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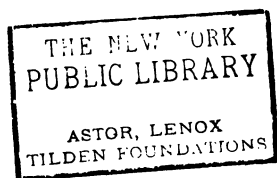
Keep two circulars

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From Della Thompson

OH ()







"SHE PLAYED ANGEL."



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BY

S. SLATER, Jr., president of
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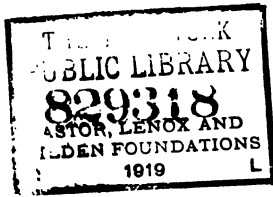
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PROLOGUE

It was the morning of a perfect June day. The sun had climbed high enough to evaporate the dew, but at this early hour, there was a comfortable coolness in the air.

Two people—a man and a woman—emerged from the woodland road. They paused for a moment to lean over the ruinous stone wall and listen to the song of the bobolinks.

The young woman broke a spray from the rose bush beside her, letting the branch, with its burden of fragrant blossoms, fall across her shoulder. Thereupon her companion drew pencil and sketch book from his pocket and, admonishing her to "stand perfectly quiet," proceeded to make a sketch.

This completed, the two went on their way. They were making for the hill, which, like a giant fortress, projected across the narrow valley. Up—up—rose the stony green hillside,—it seemed a mountain rather than a hill.

The girl and her companion, climbed slowly, with many pauses and backward looks at the widening landscape. Both climbed well with easy graceful motion, the young woman usually in the lead. The light breeze caught her white dress and drifted it in billows about her. She had removed her hat and the wind ruffled her dark hair making little curls about her face which she brushed back impatiently.

"Who is first at the top?" she challenged, laughingly evading the hand stretched to detain her.

"That's like a girl to ignore the rules of the game," said the young man, panting up.

"And what were the rules, sir slothful? Sit thee beside me and make thy complaint.—"

"You think to disarm me that way, do you?"

"Disarm you?—I hadn't thought—what were you quarrelling about?—I have no mind for earthly things—I always soar skyward when I reach this eminence."

"So do I— to the extent of some two or three hundred feet."

"Oh, you materialist!—hold your tongue and let me soar."

"All right—go ahead," laying his hand on her arm, "but I will take the precaution to see that you are safely tethered." His eyes followed hers and both sat absorbed in the panorama which lay before them.

Beautiful as was the landscape, the eye of the beholder would have wandered from it to the face of the girl. The asseveration that "beauty is but skin deep," was a well meant intention to console the homely. There is beauty of a skin-deep kind, but it makes no lasting impression, unless accompanied by the inner—the soul beauty. When the two are combined you have something well nigh irresistible. The girl drew a long breath,—“I've come down,” she said.

Her companion was again busy with sketch book and pencil. "I wish your 'aerial drop' had been less sudden—I've lost the poise of the head, the curve of the throat."

"Put up that sketch book, please, Lynn,—I'm afraid I shall hate it."

"Why, you are the very one who has been foremost in urging me to devote myself to it!"

"Don't I know it?—There's feminine consistency for you. I am acting much as did old speckle when I put her in the watering-trough this morning—your going makes me furious—'mad as a setting hen.'"

The young man gently took her hand in his, "you know I wanted you to go, too, Joanna."

"Yes, dear, I know,—you musn't mind me," leaning her head against his shoulder. "I'll recover presently."

"It isn't too late," he urged, "we could make the date a week later——"

"You dear visionary, even art students must live, and art is a jealous mistress—she would do much more for you if you went without a wife."

"But you are losing such an opportunity—think of your voice."

"As if I should think of my voice with you in Paris,—or with you anywhere. My wrath against fate smoulders—don't stir the embers or they will burst into flame."

"Well, it doesn't seem right.—"

"Hush, dear, you know I cannot leave home now, just as things are, besides it would increase expense and limit your time—two things forbidden to art students. I'll stay at home and sing to the citizens of this sleepy village, who knows but I'll have won fame and fortune when you return!"

"Small chance you have of either, if you stay here. If it hadn't been for you, I should probably be weighing out sugar and coffee behind the counter of that stuffy little grocery. What do you suppose I thought the first time you dropped in there?"

"Something flattering, I hope."

"I had been told that Dr. Lester's daughter was handsome. The moment you entered I knew it was you. I thought then, and still think, you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

"Oh, but that is most arrant flattery. Skip over it and go on with your story."

"Well, I was measuring molasses and you fairly took away my breath when you invited me to meet Simpson, the artist. I let the contents of that molasses jug pour itself out upon the floor. Besides cleaning it up, I had to pay the old skinflint."

"Poor Lynn. Poor fellow—did I make you suffer all that? I thought you looked cool enough but I didn't know about the molasses."

"They chaffed me so about it, I lived in misery for a while for fear you would find it out."

"Dear, how very foolish you were—as if a thing of that sort could make any difference."

"I was pretty hard hit and have been ever since. You were always my good angel, Joanna. If I win out I shall have you to thank for it."

"Oh. But you must not talk like that—you will win through your own effort. And I am wondering how you will look when you return with your laurels?"

"Look?—Oh, I'll have a beard."

"A beard!—Out upon you,—should you appear before my discriminating eye with any such tonsorial degeneracy as that!"

The young man grinned. "I am told that fame increases with the length of beard, and that is the first thing to which I shall give attention, when I am settled in the Latin Quarter."

"Send me a picture, dear, when you achieve the result—I can't imagine you with a beard."

"I believe you are jealous—you wish to preserve the monopoly of good looks."

"My very dear young man, I haven't the monopoly and never have had—how then can I preserve it?" Then with a change of tone—"you are handsome enough as you are, dear, but I'll forgive the beard if you will promise to write often?"

"Oh, of course I'll write, but you know letter writing isn't my specialty."

"That won't matter—think how long the time will be and how glad I'll be to get a letter! And you can tell me everything from your first lesson to——"

"The growth of my beard."

"Yes, I shall want to know that."

They might have gone on forever, so loth were they to separate; for the evening saw Lynn Stephens started on a year-long absence from the land of his birth. As the sun advanced toward the zenith the coolness of the morning gave place to the heat of midday.

Stephens gathered up his sketching materials—"We might as well go," he said, "this sun is getting hot."

The homeward walk was a silent one; the girl was occupied with voiceless prayer for endurance; the man was mentally reviewing the preparations for the journey. He left her at her father's gate. A lingering clasp of the hand and a choked "good-bye"—the people of this little New England village were adverse to public demonstrations of affection.

Joanna watched him out of sight—"if he would only turn for one last glance! Why was it such a heinous crime to reveal one's feelings?"

He turned the corner and was out of sight. Waiting a moment for the iron of self control to steady every throbbing pulse, she entered the house.

"All cornf'y, mamsie, dear?—Were we gone a long time?"

The wasted form on the bed stirred a little and put out a thin hand,—“Very comfortable, dear. When does Lynn go?—I hoped he would stop.”

“He leaves to-night and—there were preparations—” Joanna’s composure showed signs of dissolution. She sank down by the bed and rested her cheek on her mother’s hand. “Please don’t talk, mamsie, until I get a new grip,—unless you talk about the fashions—the new fad for bustles, that make us look such dears.”

The other feeble hand had reached and gently smoothed Joanna’s dark locks while she was speaking, but the mother’s lips were silent.

Presently the daughter raised her head, “there, mamsie, I’m done—I’ll hurry now or the pater will think his daughter’s emotional fits are worse than an epidemic of the measles.”

Mrs. Lester was not deceived by her daughter’s pleasantries, and she, too, had played her little part. The pain she felt for that daughter’s suffering came out now and was plainly visible on her wasted features. She longed with every fiber of her feeble frame to make her child’s life as sheltered and happy as her own had been; but Joanna was different. To the nature of the dove was added a portion of the eagle’s—a nature which would force her out into the world to battle with it, for the sake of its victims. Since a day in early childhood when Joanna, in a tempest of wrath and tears, came to the

house—in her arms a bird with a broken wing—Mrs. Lester had thought of the future with some anxiety. Choking with passion the child had stamped her feet and cried, “they shall stop!—they shall!—when I grow up!”

Should she pit her woman’s strength against the world’s injustice, what would be the inevitable result?

It was not the year’s absence which aroused the mother’s anxious thought; her clearer vision had seen that to which her daughter’s eyes were blind—seen the weakness of Stephen’s nature—would his love for Joanna tide him over the breakers? Mrs. Lester feared. Her days she knew were few and she longed to leave her daughter with the heart of some one in whom she had perfect trust. And while she thought, she prayed, a voiceless prayer, such as only mother’s pray.

H. H. Hogden, ruler of Wall Street, and railroad king, was having an unpleasant quarter-of-an-hour. He had smoked three cigars and strode up and down the room as though it were a cage. He sat now before the fire, hands thrust into his pockets and chewing savagely at the remaining end of his cigar. As he sat there, one couldn’t help thinking how well his sobriquet—“the hog,” fitted him, for his manner indicated several phases of porcine ferocity. Some waggish broker had called him “Hog” Hogden which was soon shortened to “the hog.” His life-sized portrait hung just above the mantelpiece before him, and in the pictured face, you discovered things which must long have disappeared from the life of the man.

The man on the wall might have been thirty-five years of age; tall, square shouldered, large, clear blue eyes, dark brown hair and moustache, the latter concealing the faintly forming lines about the mouth, which were so apparent in the man before the fire. There was a sad, wistfulness in the eyes of the portrait while the orbs of the financier were often but mere pin points of steely light.

Herbert Hogden had spent all his life, since early manhood, in Wall Street. It had been his youthful determination to become master among financiers. Accordingly, when opportunity offered him a wife and seventy thousand dollars, he accepted it, though he was false to the young woman whose love he had won.

And she, poor thing, drooped and died within a year. It was Hogden's first great struggle and he paid the price. Years after, in building a new railroad, his colleagues decided on the shorter more direct route which led through a country graveyard. Great was their surprise when the 'master' ordered them to "go around and cross the river."

"Hogden has gone dotty for once," said the manager, "a circuitous route and build a bridge, all for a country grave yard."

But it was with something akin to joy that the great financier looked across the river at the grave in the shadow of the willows. If he had been her destroyer in life, he had preserved the peace of her final resting place. Poetic justice, perhaps, but it was all that distinguished him from a money making machine.

When Herbert Hogden's son was born all that

was good in his nature awoke and went out toward that son. He even fancied that the wide gray eyes which met his with an answering look, were like those other gray eyes,—closed under the daisies. When the baby lisped “papa,” he was as happy as it was possible for him to be; but he reckoned too early,—if we bargain with life, the price must be paid even to the last farthing.

Mrs. Hogden viewed with displeasure the delight her husband took in his son. She married her husband without loving him; and in a selfish, narrow mind, jealousy is easily aroused. His love for his son seemed to be an injury to herself and, under one pretext and another, little Richard saw less and less of his father.

Naturally, Hogden became more and more engrossed in business, thinking, whenever he really thought of his son, that he would follow in his father’s foot-steps, when he reached man’s estate—then he would have his son’s companionship. It was a bitter disappointment when young Richard chose the study of medicine. But little had been said by the elder Hogden concerning his son’s choice. He had frankly stated his disapproval, his son had said little, and the matter dropped.

Still Hogden senior was vaguely aware that his son was continuing the study of medicine. He had offered no further objection, affecting to think there would be time enough when his son really entered the business of life.

To him, that time had now arrived, but he felt very sure that his son would not see things from his standpoint—it was this that caused him so much unrest on this particular evening.

For half an hour he had been staring into the fire, getting no consolation from his thoughts. With an impatient gesture, he removed the badly chewed cigar stump,—“It’s got to be done,” he muttered, “might as well have it over,” and he reached for the bell.

“See if Richard is in his room,” he said to the gray haired butler who presented himself, “and tell him I want him in the library.”

He then sank back into his former position and was so lost in thought he was unaware of his son’s entrance.

“Well, father.”

Mr. Hogden started and looked up at his son—looked at him long and keenly. Richard Hogden returned the gaze calmly, somewhat inquiringly.

“Sit down, Richard.”

In acquiescence, his son sank into the depths of an easy chair and stretched his feet toward the fire. For a few minutes there was silence—they heard the ticking of the clock. Then the elder Hogden spoke.

“I’ve been thinking, Richard, it was time you settled down in life—how old are you—twenty-three?” His son nodded.

“I’ve—well, I’ve got a little surprise for you,” he continued facetiously, “your mother and I have been talking it over. There’s a girl from her old home in Carolina,—a distant relative. It’s her opinion you couldn’t find a better one. I’ve never seen the girl but I guess they are all pretty much alike.” He paused, selected a cigar and twirling it in his fingers, he sent a quick keen glance at his son.

“I’ve let you have your little fling, but I suppose

you have learned by this time, 'it's money makes the mare go.'"

Receiving no reply he went on: "This girl hasn't much in her own right but her father—dam him—has it in his power to stop my putting through the H. and P. road. It's the biggest deal I have ever undertaken and I am bound to put it through"—again he looked at his son.

The face of the latter had expressed in turn astonishment and consternation, now it was a quiet mask.

"I haven't said much to you about this fad of yours,—medicine—in my opinion it is a pure waste of time—I would sooner see you go on the road as a brakeman—you'd get somewhere then."

His son was silent.

"If you will help me through with this deal, I'll give you two hundred thousand dollars for a wedding present. That's pretty well to start with—three times as much as I had." Again he paused and looked at his son.

The latter sat erect. "I thought at first you were joking—I can't think you are quite serious now. I'm sorry you don't approve of the profession I have chosen, but we thrashed that out before—I needn't go into it again. I have no liking for business, it would be useless to try it—I'll have to stick to my last."

"What does your profession, as you please to call it, amount to,—you couldn't support a wife on your earnings?"

"I haven't a wife, neither do I intend to have one," replied Richard Hogden, belligerently, "at least, for the present," he added.

"You mean you would throw away two hundred thousand dollars?"

"Yes, or two hundred million, if it married me to a woman I did not love."

"What has that got to do with it?—she is as good as anyone else. You have not seen her—why not wait until you do see her?"

The son hesitated. "Let me understand this matter fully. Does this young lady understand that this is a matter of business? Has she been told as plainly as you have told me?"

"I don't know how much of the business she understands, your mother wrote her and she is coming."

"—To meet her prospective husband, I suppose?"

"Yes, and why shouldn't she? If you were half a man, you would not keep her waiting."

A slight, derisive smile crossed the younger man's face.

"Think a moment, Richard, you have had a pretty good time in life, eh?"

"Better than I deserve, perhaps, and I am not ungrateful—you know that—"

"And yet you would refuse to help me out on this deal?"

"Father, can't you see what this means to me—it would mean ruin!"

"Do you call two hundred thousand dollars ruin?"

"What is two hundred thousand dollars in return for a life?" cried his son, springing up,—*"life with a woman I loath! I had rather dig in the streets!"*

"Perhaps you had better, if it comes to that," said the senior Hogden, grimly—"a little work of

that sort might take the nonsense out of you; you would appreciate the money then, and the wife that brought it".

"Good heavens! father, can't you get along without putting a wife, of all things, on a business basis?"

"There is where she belongs," said his father, imperturbably; "I have set my heart on this deal. You have never seen this girl—you know nothing against her—you are throwing aside a good opportunity for nothing but a piece of tomfoolery!"

"Let us understand each other. As I see it, this is a business deal—the girl and I, are the concessions thrown in to make the balance even?"

"Well, what of that? Haven't you always had the best of everything?"

"Father, don't! You have always been kind, but can't you see how I feel about this? I want to be free to live my own life in my own way, to marry the girl I love——"

"Who is she?" demanded Hogden senior.

"I haven't found her yet——"

"And for a bit of damned nonsense you refuse this girl and a fortune?"

"It isn't nonsense to me, it is life—life that is really worth the living. There is as much indifference——"

"That will do," replied the elder Hogden, coldly, "I don't care for notions. The man that can't see the value of a dollar is a fool."

For a brief space father and son were silent. Again the ticking of the clock became audible. It seemed to be ticking off a warning but the two beside the fire did not heed.

At last the son spoke and his voice gave evidence of suppressed feeling.

"I am sorry for this—truly, I am. Perhaps you won't believe me, but I have always tried to be a dutiful son. I can't do this thing you ask—to me it is monstrous, wicked,—you will see it in the same light some day."

Their positions had been reversed, it was the father, now, who was silent. The son continued:

"Perhaps it would be better for me to strike out for myself——"

"Yes, it would," was the grim response. "All these years you have had all that money could buy—the best colleges—studied abroad—everything for your advantage—and what has it amounted to?—you must play the lovesick fool. It makes me sick."

The color rose in his son's face and then faded, leaving him very pale. He arose, standing erect, a son of whom any man might be proud.

"Yes, I have had all those things, but there is one thing I haven't had."

"What is that?"

"Let it go—I couldn't make you understand. I'll go now and strive to show you I'm not altogether what you seem to think."

"Go, and don't return until you have learned the value of money."

"Father!——"

"Go!—I wash my hands of you—I have reared no fools."

The son stood for a moment irresolute,—“Good-bye, father,” holding out his hand. His father ignored it. Without further words, Richard Hogen turned and left the room, closing the door softly

behind him. And the ruler of Wall Street knew his son no more.

Herbert Hogden watched his son depart, but the grim, set face gave no sign of the pain which gripped him within. When he at last arose from his moody contemplation of the fire, there was a perceptible stoop of his shoulders which was not there before. And it increased as the years went by. His second great struggle had cost him more than he cared to own, even to himself. To stifle the longings of his outraged heart, he devoted himself more strenuously to the task of amassing dollars; fighting his financial battles with a fury that made him indifferent to everything but victory.

CHAPTER 1

After Many Days

"Beautifully done! Couldn't have had a better result!" And the surgeon clapped his colleague enthusiastically on the shoulder; but his voice was subdued for both men were clad in the garb of the operating room in a city hospital.

"Thank you, Hogden, I felt it was going to be one chance in a hundred," and the speaker straightened his back and flexed the muscles of his arms.

"One chance in a hundred, and we've won. A fighting chance like that, puts you on your mettle, though it does make kinks in your back and legs."

Two assistants lifted the unconscious patient from the table and bore him swiftly and noiselessly from the room.

Still discussing the operation, the doctors entered the lavatory adjoining. The nurse, who had stood by the patient's side, during that tedious hour, was left alone in the room. It had been a severe nervous strain, and, with the verdict of success, came the reaction, and she was trembling. She went to the window and sat down. To combat the feeling of faintness, she drew a long breath—and then another.

—"How ridiculous if she should faint—" Sitting motionless with head resting against the casing, the momentary weakness left her; still she did not stir.

The chill November breeze rustled the withered

leaves and grasses outside. Though her eye rested upon them, she seemed to see instead, a meadow under the June sun—heard the song of the bobolink—smelled the fragrance of roses and of clover. It had been so long since she had thought of them,—that was ten years ago,—she was nineteen then, she was twenty-nine now.

It had come so suddenly—the lifting of the veil from those old memories. Doctor Hogden had sent for her because another had failed to perform her duty—was there a fatality in things?

She had not known whom she was to meet; for a moment it seemed she must escape the ordeal; then she knew she was glad she was there.

He had not known her—had been nervous, afraid of the surgeon's knife. She had stood unnoticed in the background. Like a mother she had longed to comfort him, when dazed by the ether, he had gripped her hand fiercely. And thus she held it, till he was unconscious. Well, it was over now. He would live, and she was glad.

How quiet it was out there in the deserted hospital-grounds! She had once wished that she might lie quiet, with the grasses and birds above her—father and mother were there—there was no one to whom her heart clung. But God's way had not been her way—and that was long ago.

She had had a career since then. Vast audiences had been in a frenzy of delight at the sound of her voice—she had swayed them at will, from laughter to tears. But it had not satisfied her; the hearts of the people were cold, like their jewels. Neither did they really need her—another would do as well—so she came to the hospital to sing to the sick and suffering ones. And she had stayed.

Was this newly acquired peace to be destroyed by the coming of Lynn Stephens? Oh, she hoped not. but she was already asking herself what of the wife who had supplanted her in his affections?

"Miss Lester, are you sick?" and the doctor came hurriedly to her side. Joanna had arisen at the sound of his entrance. She answered now, flushed a little with annoyance, "I felt a little faint and sat down for a moment, and I so forgot myself I indulged in a day dream."

"Don't do it,—a day dream, following an operation, is a panicky thing."

"It wasn't as nice as it might have been."

The doctor was looking at her keenly—"We shouldn't have let you stand there for an hour unrelieved; but I confess, I was so intent on that operation I forgot everything else. Another time you must speak."

"And lose a life, perhaps, for a little weakness like that? It was really nothing."

"I thought women who fainted for nothing were beings of the past?"

"Did you?—You are woefully ignorant of that charming but deceitful subject, I fear."

"I confess my ignorance—won't you coach me a little?"

"Willingly, but I have little charity for the foibles of my sex—wouldn't someone else be better?—someone to help you to preserve your dear illusions?"

"You would keep me in ignorance, then?"

"Oh, but 'where ignorance is bliss,' you know—"

Hogden laughed: This is your hour off-duty" isn't it? My car is at the door, I have a few pro-

fessional calls to make—will you come?—Perhaps you can convince me of the truth of your implied statement."

"Thank you, but I do not feel that I could convince you of anything, unless you wanted to be convinced; besides, you remember, this is my afternoon with the children."

"I remember there is a rule about infringing on the recreation hour,——"

"But the other superintendent——"

"I am not the other superintendent."

Joanna smiled back at him appealingly from the doorway: "Pardon me this time, for the children's sake and—I appreciate your kindness."

"And I have been in this hospital three months," said Hogden looking at the closed door, "and I've heard her laugh not once, but always that smile—now why the devil does a woman smile like that? It makes me want to horsewhip somebody—if I could only lay hands on the right man."

"I shall find him," the last words were spoken half aloud, as the car started down the drive.

Joanna was thinking as she moved swiftly along the hall, "that it might be true there were but few people one could trust, the absolute, unshakable integrity of those few partly atoned for the lack of comfort afforded by the others."

Crossing the main entrance hall, in the direction of the stairway, she became aware that two people were making their way toward her from the door; pausing, she turned toward the advancing pair. A glance was sufficient to class the male among the *genus homo* which seems to derive nourishment from the head of a cane. She had an imperfect

vision of his flawless attire, the bright blackness of his hair and eyes, before his companion claimed her attention.

The woman advanced directly toward her; rather short in stature, with quick, nervous movements, she beckoned jerkily to Joanna with her lorgnette.

Joanna waited. She noted the large white hat with the green and black plumes and showy rhinestone buckle which surmounted the rather untidy red hair.

"I wish to see my husband—he recently underwent an operation here—name?—oh, Stephens. I was away from home and did not know his plans—it is one of Mr. Stephens' peculiarities to keep his family in ignorance."

"I understand," was Joanna's mental comment, and she wondered if those pale hazel eyes and thin red lips could look more shrewish.

"I would see him at once."

"The whole name, please?"

"Why, I told you——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Stephens might mean several of our patients."

"Lynn Stephens, the artist," impatiently.

She was beginning to think this superior looking person in nurse's uniform needed to be shown her proper place.

"So this was his wife!" It seemed to Joanna she had been beaten, one blow after another, until every nerve in her body groaned. "His wife! and this other fellow? Her glance rested upon him for one brief moment, was rewarded by a stare of open admiration from his dull black eyes. Her thoughts crowded fast upon each other as she conducted the

pair up the stairs, "Who was this dandy and why did she bring him? Her husband at death's door and she did not know it?—Why?—Why?—Was there a skeleton in the closet?"

Civilization was best, of course, but she longed to return, for a moment, to more primitive ways; longed to sieze this over-dressed product of an effete civilization and through corporal pain, make her to realize her duty to that unconscious piece of humanity which awaited them. But civilization—when you have really got it—stays; it cannot be put off and on. What she did was to wait for them at the top of the stairway with the unconscious air of a queen.

Mrs. Stephens had assumed a lofty manner which sat grotesquely upon her, being short of stature—only the tallest and stateliest of women can safely assume a lofty air in climbing stairs.

"Is your elevator out of order?" she asked tartly, when she reached the top of the winding flight,—a little out of breath.

"I beg your pardon, the elevator is farther down the hall—I usually take the stairway." Joanna's tone expressed only gentle regret. "If you will sit here a moment, I will find the doctor. He will tell you more about your husband than I can. Mr. Stephens has just been brought here from the operation and is yet under the influence of ether."

"Thoroughly disagreeable person!" remarked Mrs. Stephens, looking at Joanna's retreating figure. Don't you think so, Lionel?"

"Aw!—yes—of course—not badish looking, though."

"For my part, I hate to see a woman with black hair!"

Why a woman should not have black hair as well as a man, was too great a conundrum for Lionel; he returned to his cane for consolation, but he watched closely for the reappearance of the dark-haired nurse.

Joanna encountered the doctor who was just leaving the room. She sent him to Mrs. Stephens, then yielding to an overmastering impulse, she stepped inside.

Stephens lay as inert as he did under the surgeon's knife, save for the occasional fluttering of an eyelid and the nervous motion of a hand. With gentle but practiced hand, she adjusted the pillows and smoothed the counterpane; looked for one long moment at the face on the pillow.

The wavy, blonde hair was the same, save for the threads of gray; the Vandyke beard they had joked about was there, and the moustache waxed to needle-points. Was the change owing only to a different barber, or was it a change of the inner man, and these but the outward expression?

A sudden pain gripped her. This was not the Lynn Stephens she had known, with his frank sunny ways and boyish enthusiasm. This man was older, life had robbed him of his youth and given him only the superficial in return. He belonged to that woman out there in the hall—the past was but an unpleasant memory. Let her take herself away; if unhappiness was his portion, he had asked no sympathy from her.

"No, I won't see him now—he is unconscious you say?"—Mrs. Stephens was saying as Joanna, re-

turning, passed through the hall; "I don't wish to burden my mind with memories of the unpleasant. Besides, I have an engagement."

"Poor Lynn! No wonder he had grown old and worldly wise. She pitied and forgave and that was all she could do. Their paths must lie as far apart as the poles. Life had lost its charm, but there was always work to do."

"Did you notice the nurse?" Mrs. Stephens was saying to Lionel Neville.

"Aw—yes—certainly—which one?"

"Why, the one I thought so insolent—the black-haired one. I thought she looked like someone I had seen—it came to me just as we entered this car, who it was."

"Well, who was it?"

"Why, Miss Lester who sang at the Metropolitan last season."

"Aw, yes—now you mention it. But of course it couldn't be."

"No, of course it couldn't be. I'm so sorry," she continued in a fretful voice,—*"This operation has upset all our plans—I verily believe he did it on purpose. Of course we will have to give up our winter abroad now."*

"Of course!"

"We might manage it," said Mrs. Stephens, a moment later,—*"I have a plan. I can't tell you about it now—come over to tea this evening, only two or three friends, they won't stay long and then we can discuss my idea. I'm wild to get out of this stuffy city, we are so crude and provincial in America!"*

Mrs. Stephens didn't add—perhaps didn't admit,

even to herself—that the non-appearance of her name on the list of invited guests at a certain dinner party, was the occasion of the “stuffiness” and the “crudeness.”

“You won’t come in? as Neville left her at her door,—don’t forget this evening—come early.”

CHAPTER II

The Voice Sang

When Lynn Stephens awoke from the ether sleep, the first thing of which he was aware, was a voice. Its melodies came floating to his ear across intervening space. It seemed to call, to urge him on, it sang lullabies he had heard in childhood. Then he was a boy with snow-shoes and sled, and still the voice kept calling. He followed it over fields of daisies, through the woods, over streams, then it suddenly stopped, the darkness shut in around him and he knew no more.

It was two days later when he feebly opened his eyes. They rested on a quiet white capped figure, gradually his vacant look brightened, the nurse bent nearer.

"The voice," he faintly articulated after much difficulty,—~~"Where did—the—voice—go?"~~

"It will come back—take this and rest awhile," and again darkness closed in around him.

On the morning of the fourth day, he was back in the world of realities, though still very weak.

"You don't happen to have angels here do you?" he asked.

"Yes, we have a few."

Stephens smiled, "that accounts for the voice I heard—do they sing often?"

"Almost every day in some part of the building."

"Indeed! Will they sing here?"

"Yes, by and by."

He closed his eyes in satisfaction, glad to be a little stronger before he heard that voice again—it had sounded like, so very like—but of course she wouldn't be here.

In the days which followed, he crept slowly, painfully back to life. At first his great physical weakness, held his mind in benumbing grasp; he was content to lie for hours watching the white uniformed nurses as they glided about. There were so many of them and they moved so swiftly, he never knew just how many there were.

On sunny days, for a few hours during the day, the sun sent a golden shaft of light across the walls of his room. He watched it travel from one point to another and when it disappeared he was always conscious of a vague disappointment,—"nothing ever comes back!" he said to the puzzled nurse, one day, "nothing ever comes back!"

When his bodily pain grew less and his strength increased, his mental horizon widened. But he found he had exchanged one kind of pain for another, and in his anguish of spirit, he almost wished that physical weakness might again numb his senses. He began to think about and to know Lynn Stephens better than he had ever known him before.

His youth had been remarkable for nothing, unless it was indifference. Indifference to his father's dissolute ways, his mother's fret and worry—and she had had much to worry her, like a healthy growing animal, he was indifferent to all save the satisfying of his own physical need—until *she* came.

And, with the coming of Joanna Lester, his better nature awoke, through her mysterious alchemy, he became a man, strong, purposeful, looking with longing eyes, adown the vistas of art which she opened before his gaze.

How devoted she had been, a mother, sister, sweetheart rolled into one; she had lifted him out of the slough, and set him on his feet, in the road to success—made a man of him. Good God! what was he, now? He was no man! He had repaid her devotion by treachery and desertion! He had asked her to be his wife and then had coolly, deliberately ignored her altogether and married another woman.

And he forced himself to consider every act which led to such a dishonorable culmination—slurred over nothing, tried to consider and to judge as he would judge the shameful career of another man.

He had not meant to do this thing—God knew he had not meant it! Why hadn't the all-powerful devised a way of killing such wretched failures outright, for the sake of the innocent ones who suffered by their fate?

He wanted another year in Paris. Joanna had always prayed for his success—yes, he had been base enough to reason that way. His marriage brought him the coveted additional time. It had also brought him the humiliation of being a pensioner on his wife's bounty—humiliation as bitter as death.

He had not loved his wife. He wondered why she married him. She had been to the hospital, to see him, once, they said—the day of his opera-

tion—he had received one short letter regretting his illness—it happened at such an inopportune time.

It occasioned him no bitterness—he knew he was of less importance to her than a day's pleasure. If he had darkened her life, she had ruined his—they were quits.

His marriage had been, at first, concealed from Joanna. He wrote her briefly saying "he would be absent for some time in southern Europe—would write when again established and send his address. In his weakened condition, he could not restrain the tears, and they burned their way from beneath his closed eyelids, as he thought of that letter.

Thank Heaven! he had atoned for that in some measure—had written her, later, of his marriage and asked her forgiveness, had acknowledged his indebtedness to her love. She was much too good for him, he said, he didn't deserve, but hoped for her friendship.

To this letter was received no reply. It was a keen disappointment. He had not, until then, realized how large a place in his life, she had filled. At the time, he thought her unforgiving, now, he wondered that she could bear to look upon his face.

He had seen her once since his return to America—could not believe it was she until he heard her voice. On the outskirts of the throng, he caught unsatisfactory glimpses of that black robed figure on the stage—she always wore black, they said. The audience grew frantic in its applause, it arose to its feet and gave one hoarse cry "Lester!" He thought he had witnessed nothing more impressive, and he, poor wretch, had slunk away too ashamed

to speak. He, of all that vast throng, could not congratulate her on her success.

Then she disappeared, it was rumored that she had gone abroad. He would follow—must follow—must hear from her own lips—if she could in some measure—forgive his shameful, damnable treatment of her.

Of the future he would not think. It, also, was an unpleasant subject. Genius was dead, art had become drudgery, and the need of money forced him to accept work that was distasteful to him—nothing was too menial for his brush that brought remuneration.

That his wife openly derided him, he knew, but they lived such separate lives, he seldom felt the real sting of it. When he did, it was like a lash on the raw flesh, and on one such occasion it resulted in a quarrel, in which divorce was openly mentioned.

"Speaking of divorce," he had said with the sarcasm of the brow-beaten when at last aroused, "you need not hesitate, there are many things worse than that." A little startled, that she had drawn fire from where she had least expected it, Mrs. Stephens had silently writhed and vouchsafed him no answer, and the miserable quarrel had been followed by an equally miserable peace.

"An eye for an eye," "a tooth for a tooth," he deserved all he got but that didn't make it any easier.

"The voice has come," said the nurse interrupting his unpleasant train of thought. "I will leave the door ajar, then you can hear."

"The voice?" queried Stephens, made irritable by his weakness.

"Yes, have you forgotten the voice that sang? Listen, and you will hear it again."

And Stephens heard. It began, as in his ether sleep, softly melodiously, it soothed and charmed. Then it changed, the blood flowed faster, the listener had a longing to be up and away in the world of nobler action. The melody grew richer, sweeter, it gripped the heart, one heard a sob for his sins, joy for his joys, till the voice ended in a grand finale of hope, forgiveness and perfect peace—the peace was so perfect, so sweet, Stephens felt the tears rush to his eyes.

The stillness which followed seemed to be echoing with those notes of peace; then a man's voice was heard, "that will do for to-day—I have shed tears enough." The ripple of laughter annoyed Stephens; he was listening hungrily for the sound of *her* voice. He knew her, now—did she know he was there and was it to him she sang? He wanted to think so, the entrance of the nurse caused him to start with nervous expectation, and then sink back disappointed on the pillow.

The nurse was followed by the doctor, "Well, how do we find ourselves to-day?" Stephens had called Richard Hogden in those student days in Paris, "a cold blooded fish." Heir to millions, yet could find no better way of obtaining comfort from his money, than grubbing away at chemistry and medicine. Hogden on his part, thought his gay, handsome fellow countryman much like the fabled fly in the honey pot. In spite of their differences, being fellow countrymen in a foreign land, they had come to know each other pretty well.

"Oh, I'm feeling pretty fit," replied Stephens

thinking how little Hogden's residence abroad had changed his outward appearance. He would always be an American. And then he felt a twinge of envy, as he noted the fine physique—he might be an American but it was an American of the best type.

The doctor gave him a scrutinizing look, "you are thinking too much, man. It doesn't matter what particular sin you have committed, the most heinous thing you can do now, is to remain sick on my hands."

"Does that cast a reflection on you, or on me?"

"I am not thinking about reflections—I am looking ahead."

"I am a doubtful case, eh?"

"I think," said the doctor, speaking with grave decision, "that the chances were all against you, but you have pulled through wonderfully, so far, your recovery is assured, if—" he paused a moment, "some victories are so undecisive a return to the battlefield is necessary; you are offering only a passive resistance to the enemy, if you wish to make your victory complete, you must arouse your fighting blood."

Stephens smiled lazily, "I believe, Hogden, you were always a fighter."

"Yes, that is the most they can say of me."

"But they say a great deal, don't they?"

"Do they?"

"Do they?" mocked Stephens, "wasn't I assured that you were the greatest surgeon to be found this side of the Atlantic, before trusting this precious body of mine to your care? And since I have been here the nurse informs me, you lack nothing but wings, and she affects to believe you will receive those some day."

"May such belief be rewarded—which nurse?"

Stephens laughed. The doctor's outspoken manner secretly amused him, but he failed to realize that the other was much the subtler man.

"I believe you are as greedy for praise as the rest of us, who live for it."

"Praise delights the ear as sweet perfume the nostril—neither are lasting. I should want something heartier for a regular diet."

"That is all well enough for you fellows who have a million dollars back of you, but the man who lives by his art must win approval or starve."

"Unfortunately, that is often true. But a just appraisal, most men get sometime in their lives. Art is like a jealous woman, she is happiest when she is making you miserable. In other words, the great in art is born in stress and struggle."

"All the same a millionaire is the only man fit to become an artist."

"Tut, tut, man, I shall have to increase my doses. Such a jaundiced view as that comes only from a disordered liver."

Stephens' reply was checked by the opening of a door, the open door made audible Joanna's song.

"Beyond their utmost purple rim.

Beyond the night, across the day.

Thro' all the world she follow'd him,—"

she sang, while both men silently listened until the closing of the door again shut out the sound. Hogden sat with hands thrust into his pockets and jaws grimly shut. Stephens' hand was shading

his eyes, "when did Miss Lester return from abroad?" he asked.

"She did not go abroad—has been in New York all the time."

"Has been here all the time!" echoed Stephens, incredulously, withdrawing his hand.

"Yes. She has been here in this hospital much of the time, and I venture to say many dying beds have been easier for her presence."

"But what quixotic thing to do. I was present when she made her debut in the world of song—heavens! how she swayed that throng! I never saw anything more impressive."

"I know—I was there."

"Why she should leave such a career for this, I can't comprehend."

"Miss Lester is one of those rare women, you meet, perhaps, once in a life time. I've wondered why, in the divine plan of things, we couldn't have had more of them."

Stephens looked up quickly, but Hogden's gaze was fastened critically on the toe of his shoe.

"But it can't be she intends to sacrifice such a future for this?" he persisted.

"She sees things from a different point of view than we do. She sings to the sick—prays for them—comforts them—and they well nigh worship her in return. I was in the children's ward the other day, and one youngster showed me a picture of an angel with outstretched wings. He called my attention to the wings and gravely asked me "wouldn't I tell Miss Lester to wear hers on the outside when next she came?"

"What did Jo—Miss Lester say?"

Hogden gave him a quick keen look but Stephens' face was again concealed by his hand.

"She said it was my fault—I had deceived the boy," he ended lamely. He was thinking that little memory was his alone, and he should keep it. He had delivered the little patient's message; to his surprise, Joanna had hidden her face in her hands, but looked up smiling a moment later.

"How could you have let him believe such a thing?"

"Because he half convinced me he was right," he had said and she had blushed—such an adorable blush—but her look as she swept past him, was calculated to reduce him to his short trouser days. A golden opportunity for revenge was his, the next morning. He encountered her as she was leaving the children's ward, where with paper wings and crown she had "played angel" until they were in ecstasies of delight. Seeing him, she put her hands behind her and stood with her back against the wall, like a naughty child, and he had teased her, admiring her fiery cheeks and defiant eyes. Then the defiant look had faded, the lips had curved in that wonderful smile, and he thought,—no matter what he thought, he certainly shouldn't relate it to any one else.

"I have known Miss Lester for many years," Stephens was saying, "she gets no more than she deserves."

"I hope she gets *all* she deserves," replied Hogden rising, "that is a test which sifts out the saints from the unconverted. So few of us are satisfied that we have our rightful share. Eat well, sleep well, don't think of the disagreeable if you can help

it and remember, if you set yourself to the task of getting well, you are half way there."

Alone in his office Hogden sat down at his desk and rested his head on his hands; there was a great longing in his eyes. His idleness lasted but a moment; he was soon busy with his daily routine.

CHAPTER III

Whom God Hath Joined

Mrs. Stephens stood waiting for the carriage. A bright spot burned on either cheek and her lips were compressed in the thin red line, which her mirror had told her was so disastrous to beauty; but in her perturbation she forgot the warning.

It had come to her with such a startling revelation, only those, whose mirrors have told them the same unwelcome fact, can appreciate Mrs. Stephens' frame of mind.

That "Pretty Mrs. Stephens," had so often filled her with pride and gratification, the thought of being without that distinction, seemed no less a calamity than the coming of the end of the world, and it had come upon her so suddenly as such calamities do.

She was standing in the center of an admiring throng; white shoulders, sparkling jewels and the hum of conversation was all about her. It was an hour of triumph, until that mean little whisper came stealing its way through the leafy screen at her right "Dear me! Mrs. Stephens is really looking faded."

For the rest of the evening, the color in her cheeks and the sparkle in her eyes was not owing to art. But on the morrow, like a foolish woman, she consulted her mirror, and her mirror told her the

plain unvarnished truth. That the lines, which irritation had been forming across her brow, had become formidable wrinkles—no amount of cold cream and rubbing would erase them. About the mouth another set were clearly perceptible and, as time increased, would give to her face a harsh unpleasant look.

"Oh, why must I be so worried and tormented!" she cried, but the mirror did not answer because it couldn't, and Mrs. Stephens sank upon a chair with a despairing gesture.

Youth was passing, it was an appalling fact. She had not made a brilliant marriage, neither had she gained a firm foothold in that inner and most exclusive circle of society. And to achieve both had been the secret ambition of her girlhood.

Mrs. Stephens did what most women would have done—she chose her most becoming gown, and when thus arrayed, she stepped again, daringly, before the mirror. To her satisfaction, it revealed only youth and prettiness—unless one looked too closely, and people *would* look. Had she not herself noticed the horrid wrinkles on Mrs. Smythe's face—they made her look positively ugly! And the bald spot, on Jack St. Jacques' head, had grown at least an inch wider in the last few months. He had been at such pains to conceal it, and he couldn't now—oh, yes! people would notice—in that lay all the tragedy!

"A social failure!" She shuddered as she thought of two or three forlorn nobodies, who had been "dropped" and clung now to the ragged outskirts of society.

And there was another harassing thought. Just

as some of the doors of that inner circle were opening unto her, the most important one of all strategically, the one she most longed to enter, was shut in her face with a bang.

"Oh, it was base! It was shameful!" and Mrs. Stephens ground her teeth with rage.

What hope was there for one who had passed her zenith and was face to face with wrinkles and gray hair? It was a practiced hand, which had struck the blow, at that vital moment. And for what reason? Was it because of Lionel Neville? Who had dared to cast the stone at her? She could name dozens worse than she. Was it not a well known fact that the Stillings had repudiated their marriage vows? Mrs. Stillings openly boasted of having more platonic friendships than any other woman in their set; while her husband pleaded in extenuation of his many flirtations, that their motto was "live and let live."

No, society was seldom discriminating on questions of morals; there must be some other reason. Was it jealousy? It might be; there was Count Neville, she had succeeded in carrying off from under the very noses of her rivals.

Whatever it was her victory lay in a coup d'etat—It was this that brought the ominous light to her eye, while she stood waiting for the carriage.

Mrs. Stephens drove first to the Art Club, of which she was a member, and withdrew her name. "She had been suddenly called abroad," she said in response to the voluble regret expressed. Next, she made several calls upon her intimate friends, and, when she last resumed her carriage, she felt morally certain that the rest of the "set" would

be in full possession of the facts before night. The facts were these; owing to domestic infelicity, she had withdrawn from society; and, for the present, would seek refuge with the countess Neville of Paris. The countess had kindly placed her chateau, on the coast of Brittany, at her disposal. All the needed embellishments, her long suffering at the hands of a faithless husband and her endurance of his prodigal expenditure, would be supplied and gain much by the telling, she had no doubt.

Mrs. Stephens then directed her coachman to the hospital.

A hush seemed to pervade the wide hall. "It was as if she had stepped into the chamber of the dead," she thought.

"It was ridiculous, of course, to tell a sick man you were going to divorce him,—but what could she do? It wasn't her fault he was sick."

Stephens had insisted on getting up that morning. The change which had come over him, greatly puzzled his attendants. Hogden said nothing, but watched him closely, advising him to "make haste slowly" much to Stephens' disgust.

"Your attitude Hogden," he complained, "reminds me of the story they tell about a Frenchman. He was on a train I believe, and he thrust his silk hatted head too far out of the window, for safety. In American fashion, they warned him to 'look out!' He obeyed the command to the letter and lost his hat in consequence. No doubt he had it in his heart to use some expressive French words—but a Frenchman is nothing if not polite—so he merely remarked, 'in America evidently, when they said 'Look out' they meant 'Look in.'"

"Now, from the day I entered your blessed institution, I've had it dinned into my ears for three meals, regularly, and sometimes for lunch. If I wish to get well I must make an effort. After that idea really begins to take root, why, I am going too fast forsooth! It beats me!"

"Go ahead, you will feel better when you get all that out of your system."

Stephens let himself sink back into his chair; his fingers drummed impatiently, "I wonder, Hogden," he began abruptly, "how you happened to study medicine?"

"I think it was owing to a visit to Ellis Island. Why?"

"I would have supposed a visit there would have knocked the idea out of your head forever—one small ought to have been sufficient."

"It was powerful enough, I grant, but it knocked the idea in instead—that and the story of an unfortunate immigrant. I swore to exterminate disease."

"You have got a big job on your hands," restlessly shifting his position, "how much longer are you going to keep me here?"

"Remember there's nothing gained by haste—it's the steady strong pull that moves the load."

"But man, I've—I've got something to do."

"I expect you have—that's why you are stopping here—meanwhile rejoice that you are alive to do it."

"Yes, I suppose I ought," said Stephens half to himself, shading his eyes with his hand, "but it has been a mighty slow repentance and it irks me damnably to be tied up here."

Hogden regarded him with a keenly observant

glance. Unless he could be freed from that which preyed upon his mind, advance was at a stand-still; it might even become a retrograde movement.

"What is it that is fretting you?" he asked abruptly but kindly. "There ought to be some way out of it."

Stephens was silent for a moment. "You remember what you said when that American, Miss Peyton, invited us fellows to see Mademoiselle La Farie dance?"

"No,—What did I say?"

"You said you couldn't afford it for you might some time wrong some good woman by lessened respect for her womanhood. And that," said Stephens, huskily, "that is what I have done—I have wronged the best woman on earth."

Hogden's hands clenched on the arms of his chair till the knuckles shone.

"If it is that," he said grimly, "I think I shall let you go."

"Don't you think I won't!" and Stephens made an impulsive attempt to rise.

"Easy—easy," laying a restraining hand on his arm, "there is always a right way of doing things, if one can find it. What have we here?" This last remark was occasioned by the entrance of the attendant, bringing a magnificent bouquet of Jacqueminots. "Look there, man, isn't that enough to scatter the whole crowd of blue devils?"

Stephens sat erect in pleased surprise. The accompanying card bore the letters, "J. L." "Joanna," he thought, and his face illumed.

"They are beautiful, I think I never saw finer," and Hogden looking down at them noted both the flowers and Stephens' radiant face.

"I think they will let you alone, now—I mean the devils."

Left to himself, Stephens devoured the card with eager eyes.

"Why couldn't she have written just a word?" But it was like her to leave her message to the flowers, and it was enough—he understood.

The artist began to awake and he sighed for his brush; if he could only transfer to canvas the great crimson, glowing heart of a rose! And the other of pale clear yellow, they were so large, so fragrant, so perfect and yet so delicate, it seemed a touch might deface them. How pure they were! how pure!—like Joanna herself.

So absorbed was he in their contemplation, when next the door opened he did not turn his head. His wife's voice brought him back from his artist's dreamland, with a painful jar.

When love's chalice lies broken, and the spirit that blessed it, has fled from it's sacrilege—or has revealed itself a grinning imp of mammon—the people, who received it at the altar, will discover that every other interest in common has also vanished—nothing remains—they have nothing to say to each other.

Stephens invited his wife, in an automatic way, to sit down, and there seemed nothing more he could say. He couldn't talk about himself; it was evident she was not much concerned with either his life or his death. He wondered why she came; she had sought this interview, the burden of conversation rested on her, she might state her wishes as she chose.

Mrs. Stephens' gaze wandered about the room, resting at last on the flowers.

"Beautiful aren't they?" said her husband, glad to break a silence that was becoming painful.

"Who sent them?"

Stephens felt as if he were being dragged to the witness stand, and one by one, his heart's secrets were to be torn from him and held up to public gaze.

"J. L." is the signature on the card—I thought it might be from Joanna Lester."

"Then she really was here the day I came?" and Mrs. Stephens looked up with some show of interest.

"I don't know about that, but she has been here."

"How strange! she was dressed like a nurse. Why should she want to spend her time in such a place?"

Stephens looked silently at the flowers. His wife saw his look, but did not rightly interpret it.

"It was more likely they came from Julia Lendenning," she said maliciously.

"Oh, I hadn't thought of her, and his face revealed something of his disappointment.

To his wife, it appeared chagrin at the discovery of his guilty secret; his crediting the favor to the famous singer, was mere fabrication, the credulous might believe, but not she.

"Miss Lendenning is very lavish in her gifts," she said looking at the Jacqueminots.

Stephens turned away his face; his pleasure in them had gone; like a chill November frost, his wife's presence seemed to settle upon everything and leave it frozen—dead.

"It has placed me in a very uncomfortable position, your coming here."

"How is that?"

The indifferent tone nettled her.

"I was told nothing about it—it has placed me in a very embarrassing position. It was very thoughtless of you."

"You were away and the doctor counseled immediate action. I sent you word and came here—what else could I have done?"

Stephens' voice sounded as if he were repeating something learned by rote, but his fingers beat a nervous tattoo on the counterpane.

"Men seldom realize the vexations to which their conduct exposes us."

He left this remark unanswered. It might be true, certainly, the reverse was true.

"I think I'll be at home before long—Hogden keeps me tied to the bed pretty well," he remarked, to break another painful pause.

"Did you say Hogden? It couldn't be one of the Fifth Avenue Hogdens could it?"

"It's the son."

"Indeed! I should really like to meet him."

"He left the room just before you entered—didn't you encounter him in the hall?"

"I don't remember, but I wouldn't have known him, you ought to have told me—the Hogdens are received everywhere."

"He isn't—his father has cast him off," replied Stephens wearily. He was feeling very much exhausted and his wife's social inanities bored him almost beyond endurance. It seemed in spite of himself, that his head fell back on the pillow and his eyes weakly closed.

"You know I was intending to go abroad?"

Mrs. Stephens' voice sounded to the overwrought nerves, like a file on a piece of steel.

"I have heard you speak of it," and the voice betrayed his utter weakness, his wife stiffened.

"I cannot well change my plans and, as I shall need money, I have left the house with McCormick for disposal."

Her husband still lay with closed eyes. She felt annoyed; indifference from men was something to which she was unaccustomed.

"Perhaps I told you, I should remain abroad for a year, at least." Her tone had increased in acerbity.

"I don't remember that you mentioned it," replied Stephens without lifting his eyelids.

"The countess Neville has placed her chateau at my disposal; I shall live, quiet and secluded, during the winter."

Her husband slowly opened his eyes. "Just what do you want me to understand?" he asked.

A faint color came into Mrs. Stephens' face, she answered sharply, "that I shall not return."

His only reply was the closing of the eyelids.

It was so still in the little room, that the voice of a newsboy on the street could be heard.

"Here's yer latest! body of a girl found in river! All—about—the—wreck! Great—divorce—case!"

Mrs. Stephens fidgeted.

"That Egyptian tapestry," she began hurriedly and with evident effort, "if you could pay the money loaned, I—I shall need the money."

Stephens raised his head, a burning blush crept up over his face, "I haven't the money," he said.

"Couldn't you sell the tapestry?" Mrs. Steph-

ens' eyes were fixed on the costly muff which she was nervously fingering.

"I don't know—when do you want the money?"

"In about three weeks Li—count Neville and his party sail then."

"You might sell it yourself."

"Oh, I know nothing about such things—couldn't you write to your friends?"

"Perhaps, I'll try."

"I think I will go now—good-by."

Stephens only nodded in return; it seemed to him he could not speak. He sank back again into his chair with a sigh of relief as the door closed.

The red again suffused his face even to the roots of his hair; he clenched his hands feebly, wishing he was a little boy so he could cry. Had he deserved all this? He had been a scoundrel he knew, but didn't their punishment ever end?

The Egyptian tapestry was a cherished possession, the only thing of value he had ever purchased for his studio, and he had been forced to ask his wife for a small loan to complete the purchase. He had returned many times the borrowed sum—was it necessary that he specify saying, "this goes to pay that borrowed money." It seemed one last cruel stab to remind him that he had been a pensioner on her bounty.

The thought of Joanna came to him with poignant pain; he opened his eyes and looked at the flowers.

Did she send them, or was it Julia Lendenning?

He was but a worthless wretch at best, it was almost a pity that Hogden's knife was so skillful. If there was love in life, of which the poets sang,

he had not found it—no doubt it was his fault. He was a miserable failure in art—in love—in everything.

The door opened softly and some one entered, but he lay with closed eyes unheeding, until he felt a gentle touch on his wrist.

It acted like a galvanic battery and he stared into the face that bent above him.

"Joanna!"

She smiled as one might smile at a sick child.

"You have been up too long. There has been an accident and your nurse was detailed for duty—he will be here in a moment."

"Joanna!" breathed Stephens, "Joanna!" and with the name came an overwhelming rush of memories, and he covered his face with his hands to conceal his emotion.

On the entrance of the nurse, Joanna vanished as quietly as she had come.

CHAPTER IV

Through A Glass, Darkly

Hogden was alone in his private office. For some time, he had tried to fix his mind on the tabulated reports, which lay on his desk, and could not. With the sigh of a weary man he arose and began to walk slowly about the room.

An unusual event—unusual to him at least—had occurred that morning. An officer of the law had presented himself and asked for Lynn Stephens the artist. He had inquired the man's business and learned that he was there in the interest of the plaintiff in a divorce suit.

And he had refused the fellow admission. In thinking it over, Hogden wondered why he hadn't let Stephens take the medicine which he, doubtless, had helped to prepare for himself.

Of course it was no affair of his, if—But behind that "if" lurked so many grave possibilities, inimical to his own happiness, thought of them lay hidden in the inner recesses of his mind; and forced themselves upon his attention at every opportunity.

As Hogden paused before the window, looking out into the night, he thought how like that other night it was—the night he found himself homeless in the street.

It had rained all day and now a cold wind was rapidly turning the rain to sleet. Grotesque shadows flitted across lamp-lit spaces, for everything that was movable, the wind worried and tore, until it succeeded in obtaining some response.

Hogden went back in thought to that other night. Materially he had prospered. He had no bitter struggles, the despondancy of the friendless to embitter his memory. It had been hard to make his way single handed, but not too hard—just that amount of difficulty that develops resource and power.

By his own effort he had won his success, yet he knew he was not satisfied.

He had left his father's house in defence of what he pleased to consider an inalienable right, but the verdict would be divided he knew—some might admit that he did well to preserve his ideals; others, that it was inexpedient and foolish. Not for a moment had he regretted his decision, but he began to long for a realization of that ideal—the ideal which had cost him so much to preserve. And then one day, she had come.

In company with a fellow physician, he was returning one sultry afternoon from a week's fatiguing labor at Long Branch. An outbreak of typhoid had created a panic, and increased to a rout, as the disease spread and the hidden source defied discovery.

The two were lounging on deck enjoying the increasing coolness. Hogden had been busy with his note book till Fisher's impatient outburst aroused him.

"What is the use of teaching some people how to

live! They will only use the knowledge gained, for one more hour's pleasure."

"It's the way of the world—business on borrowed capital is clear gain—until you are forced to pay."

"I—look there!"

From behind the horizon line, was slowly rising a dark, heavy looking cloud. The two watched it with interest, it spread fan like over the cloudless but brassy sky: and twilight seemed suddenly let down upon them.

"If this were Kansas," said Fisher, I should say there was a twister coming, but as this is New York, I think we are only in for a storm."

"Something rather unusual judging from appearances; we are going to meet it in the narrows."

The passengers soon sought shelter of the cabin; only the venturesome few were left on deck.

When the storm struck, the steamer was driven out of her course somewhat. Movement in that furious wind and semi darkness was dangerous but there seemed no safer course and they moved onward with diminished speed.

They were emerging from the Narrows, when the Niantic, an out bound steamer struck them, laying the vessel on her side.

The confusion was indescribable. Above the roar of the storm, was the noise of splintering wood and the screams of frightened passengers.

Hogden had remained on deck, and the shock of the impact, threw him against the railing. As he struck, something fell against him and slid over into the sea. Instinctively he clutched it; the vivid lighting revealed the white face of a woman, uplifted near his own.

For one brief space he remained, feet and legs clinging to the railing with monkey-like tenacity.

"Let me go!" cried the woman, "save your own life!"

The steamer slowly righted itself.

"Not without yours," said Hogden, lifting her over the railing to the deck.

The fury of the storm made talking difficult, but he gathered that she spoke words of gratitude.

Taking her by the arm he supported her to the cabin where they found a state of direst confusion.

It was soon ascertained that the hold contained no water. The Niantic had merely ground its side against them; decks were ripped up, railings, and life boats, hanging at their davits, had been crushed like paper.

But they were not in a sinking condition. The boat still obeyed and turned her prow steadily toward the storm.

The casualty among passengers and crew was slight. Cuts and bruises were numerous, a few had broken limbs and some had sustained serious internal injury.

In all the hurry and confusion, Hogden found time for an occasional thought of the woman whom he had saved. He caught glimpses of her, as she moved about, seemingly unterrified, in the midst of the pandemonium, which reigned from one end of the Daphne's deck to the other, and he felt a thrill of admiration.

The storm swept on, to lose itself, in mad glee, in the bosom of the Atlantic. The Daphne moved on steadily and reassuringly toward her dock. The passengers who had fled in terror from the fever, only

to meet the greater terror of the storm, began to congratulate each other upon their miraculous escape, and, when the waters of the Hudson were reached, there was little to remind the beholder of the accident save the torn deck and the splintered timbers.

"Sir," a hand was gently laid on Hogden's arm, he turned, "you saved my life at the risk of your own. Words are poor things, are they not, to express one's gratitude? Can I thank you in any better way, than by making what you have saved of some value to my fellow men?"

For the moment Hogden returned her look in silence. He was thinking he had never before seen so Madonna like a face, or eyes which held such depth of sadness. If it had not been for the eyes he would have wondered if it were possible for a woman to be as good as she looked.

"You need not speak to me of thanks," he said, "it is enough for me to know that I have saved a life."

A smile strangely sweet curved her lips, "You ought to be a very happy man—you are a doctor, I observed," and she extended her hand with a gesture of farewell.

"Now, what's all this about?" said Fisher.

"D——n! was Hogden's savage response, "she's gone and I don't know anything about her—not even her name."

After this little adventure there began to emerge from the nebule of masculine fancies, hopes, desires, a definite shape.

"I believe she has bewitched me," he said to himself one day, as he became aware of a feeling of dis-

appointment, in surveying the crowd. And he found, in spite of himself, that slender dark robed feminine figure held his attention.

He sometimes wondered if she ever thought of him. She had thanked him properly, and that was all there need be said. She might at least suppose there would be some gratification in knowing the name of one, whose life you had saved.

She might be a married woman—the thought sent a chill over him—it was really unkind not to have given him her name.

"I have had a streak of luck," announced Fisher coming into the office, "sent a patient out of town for his health, and he rewarded my kind act by giving me two opera tickets. Now get into your togs and we'll go."

"Oh, stow all that! A physician's first duty is to care for his own health—nobody else will—and I swear, if I breathe this pestilence much longer, I shall grow a new disease as Burbank does potatoes."

Hogden had separated himself from the gay group and sat carelessly watching the brilliant company. The hum of conversation ceased, the audience sat expectant, a slender black robed figure was entering, it advanced to the center of the stage.

Hogden watched, half fascinated, "Could it be?—if she would only look in his direction."

As if in answer, she turned slowly, giving a casual glance at the box.

His pulse leaped with the exultation of a man, who after a long search finds what he has sought.

Her singing moved him, profoundly. It, like her face, had something not of earth about it. Who or

what was she anyway—some seraphic vision, so far above them she understood not their earthly desires?

Then ashamed of his savage humor, he turned to watch for her return.

Her re-appearance was a signal for an ovation. He wondered that she could remain so unmoved in such an hour of triumph—wondered till she had finished her song. He felt ashamed, then, of his carping criticism. They were strangely akin, he thought—she, too, had suffered.

Business soon took him to Baltimore, and upon his return he learned that she was in Europe.

Nothing daunted he kept steadily at work; she would return, she could not escape him now, he would abide his time.

Meanwhile, he was offered the vacant post of superintendent, at the hospital; he accepted, and hers was almost the first face he saw, when making his round of duties, after assuming the office.

She looked more Madonna like than ever in her nurse's garb. Something in his steady regard disconcerted her.

"Were you looking for some one?" she asked hesitatingly.

Hogden smiled, she did not recognize him, evidently, "Yes, many things. I am the new superintendent."

"Oh," and this time her glance steadily, questioningly probed his. It was probable she was unconscious of her searching look, for the rich color suddenly mantled her cheek.

"I beg your pardon—I fear I was rude—I was wondering if—if we were to be friends?"

"Most certainly, as far as I am concerned. I

don't wish to disturb the old order of things and shall make but few changes."

"Oh, but that is good news! I can go on my way unmolested, Dr. Sayre allowed me to do pretty much as I pleased," she added in smiling extenuation.

Hogden said nothing, but he was aware that he looked masculine contradiction.

Her glance fell and she somewhat constrainedly, gave him a word of welcome and passed on.

And he had leaped to a seventh heaven of delight—and remained there.

He was thinking of these things as he stood looking out into the night and the storm.

Was he now to be robbed of all that his heart held dear,—tricked by fate in this manner?

That man up-stairs was not worthy of a good woman's love and "Joanna!" in his anguish he almost cursed his reputation for skill, that had brought Stephens to him.

He pitied the poor wretch—a man whose weakness of flesh crushed his genius, was Joanna to be used as a prop for his weak spirit? "Joanna was his—his—he had saved her life."

Yet, in his most violent rebellion, he knew he should accept his fate—should not even tell her of his love—, if his silence spared her trouble, made her happier. She had suffered, let him make her life as happy as he could, if not in one way, in another.

The wind had hushed its fury, but the rain still fell; Hogden went back to his desk.

"May I come in?" asked a voice from the door.

"It looks as if you were coming in, in spite of me."

"Yes, I expect I shall, but I would feel better to be invited—please invite me."

"Come in," grimly, "I've a mind to lock you up and keep you here, then my authority will not be defied."

"I do not defy your authority."

"H—m, office hours from six to eight, p. m." said the doctor picking up a card.

"But you invited me to come in, you remember."

Hogden's reply was something between a laugh and a growl.

"So I am to be bearded in my den by a slip of a girl, am I? Well now that I have invited you to come in, what do you want?"

"I—won't you come out from behind that desk, please?"

Grim, purposeful, Hogden strode from behind his desk and stood looking down upon her. "Well," he said curtly.

Joanna's fingers were catching at each other behind her back—a childhood's habit when she was embarrassed or distressed.

"Sit down, Miss Lester," said Hogden, more cordially, wheeling forward a large arm chair. She disappeared in its depths, like a stray linnet.

Seating himself he said, "Go ahead, Miss Lester, let's have the whole of that tragic tale, or was it comedy? You didn't say which."

"But I'm—I'm so lost in this chair," perching herself on the front of it, "do you seat your patients here—the 'hopeless cases?'"

"No, there is nothing fatal about that chair, you needn't be afraid."

"Perhaps it is that my conscience is troublesome—I'll make my story brief."

Joanna sat directly beneath the rays of the lamp, Hogden's eyes were fixed on her from out the shadow. Their steady gaze was a little disconcerting, she caught her breath once or twice before she spoke again.

"I discovered one of Mr. Stephens' worries to-day—it was quite accidental—you know, you were attributing his slow recovery to a burdened mind. It seems he is greatly in need of money, and is forced to sell some tapestries, with which he is loath to part, and I thought,"—she hesitated, what was Hogden's thought behind those burning eyes?

"Did he tell you this?" he asked.

"No, oh no! I—I overheard it. Don't think I was eavesdropping, please. I was passing through the hall and I really could not help it."

Hogden remained for a moment lost in thought. "I wonder if you know the rest of the story?"

Joanna looked her interrogation.

"His wife is divorcing him."

But she came to see him to-day—how could she?" faltered Joanna, "if she is seeking a divorce?"

"Perhaps you can explain the workings of the feminine mind, I don't pretend to know.

"Is Stephens a friend of yours?" asked Hogden, as Joanna seemed to be studying the pattern of the tiling.

"Yes—that is," arousing from her abstraction, "I knew him several years ago."

"He was married abroad?"

"Yes, but his wife is an American."

"What did you wish me to do, Miss Lester?"

"I—I wondered if you would buy the tapestries

for me?" and Joanna extended a check which, however, Hogden did not take.

"Wouldn't it be more satisfactory if you purchased them yourself?"

"I couldn't really—there are reasons. He might think I had overheard and—I am sorry to trouble you, believe me—but I was at a loss for a better way."

Hogden took the check, gravely silent, and locked it in his desk. Somehow Joanna felt it to be a dismissal and, what was worse, her course had not met with approval.

She turned back with her hand on the door, "Perhaps I haven't made you feel it, but I am very grateful."

Hogden came up to her, "Why do you do this?"

Joanna drew herself up with an expression of weary patience.

"Because I am sick of the unhappiness of this world."

Hogden paced twice across the room before answering.

"I shall not argue the case with you, but, is that the only reason?"

"Yes," wearily.

He was standing directly in front of her, and she was aware that it required effort to meet his look. In Hogden's eyes, there was something boyishly exultant. She didn't understand, but it moved her to say softly.

"Good night."

"Good night."

As Joanna hurried along the hall, with the echo

of his "good night" in her ears, she wondered at her own lightness of spirit.

"Joanna Lester," to the face in her mirror, "air castles fall, a mirage vanishes. Life means different things to different people, fortunately or unfortunately, for you it means just one thing—work."

CHAPTER V

A New Strand in the Web

"Are you deaf, Richard Hogden?"

The person thus peremptorily addressed stopped his car and looked about him. A lady was leaning from her limousine.

"What is it, Mrs. Hunter?"

The waves of hair above Mrs. Hunter's forehead were snow white, but her black eyes retained their youthful sparkle. The light in them, now, was ominous.

"What is it?—and haven't I followed you over half the city, momentarily expecting arrest, trying to get a chance to tell you what it is. Step into my car, please."

Hogden complied with the peremptory request.

"This isn't a case of kidnapping is it?"

"It may be before I am done. Listen,—do you know anything of the whereabouts of Joanna Lester?"

"Dear Mrs. Hunter, why do you come to me with such a question—I have nothing in common with Prima Donna."

"Don't hedge, young man, report says a young lady has been seen in the hospital who bears a wonderful likeness to the lost Joanna."

"There is nothing—a striking likeness is not uncommon."

"And that from you! Oh, you miscreant! You dissembler! Not content with leading me a chase, you further waste my time. Let me tell you the young lady has been *seen* by some one who knows her! Now, a frank and full confession is all that will absolve."

"Fair lady, what have I to confess? You surely don't suspect me of having carried off and concealed your Miss Lester?"

"Stop! Don't add to your subterfuge. Is she or is she not at the hospital?"

"There is a Miss Lester," he began doubtfully.

"Oh, you prince of deceit! Do you happen to know if the young lady sings?"

"Yes, I——"

"Richard! and you knew all the time it was Joanna Lester, yet you pretended ignorance. I shall arrive late for dinner, besides keeping the guests waiting, I shall be nervous and uncomfortable. You ought to be spanked, do you hear? yes, spanked, in the good old-fashioned way, with a slipper."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Hogden so fervently that Mrs. Hunter laughed.

"Well, I will forgive you this time, if you will keep Miss Lester for me."

"Dear Mrs. Hunter, have pity for mere man—Just how am I to "keep her?" and why should I "keep her?"

"Because I want her, stupid! I want her for my concert at the close of the season. It is to be the finest, ever, really—everyone will be green with envy. I have lived with my head in the clouds, ever since

Mrs. Revel discovered her, I wouldn't let her slip through my fingers—no, not if I had to kidnap her.”

“But consider the embarrassing position in which I am placed—a hapless single man——”

“I consider nothing! If you are hapless and single, that is your own fault. I shall expect you to produce Miss Lester at the appointed time.”

“But how?”

“I don't care how!—marry her, if you can't get her any other way.”

“I should like to do that, but——”

“Give me no ‘buts’—I wouldn't give the snap of my finger for a man who couldn't carry off a young lady in case of emergency.”

“Oh, I could carry her off, all right, but if I did carry her off, she would be *my* young lady, you understand.”

“Oh, but Richard, you wouldn't have the heart to spoil my party?”

“Oh, ho! I have drawn the dragon's teeth, have I?”

“Dragon! and that is what I am is it? Let me tell you young man that I don't carry the name without playing the game.”

“A thousand pardons! it was an unfortunate quotation—you know I am always sure to get the wrong one.”

“Well, we will let it pass if you will bring Joanna to me.”

“Seriously, I think she doesn't want to be found.”

“Doesn't want to be found! Does she expect to remain forever incognito? What a crazy idea. Have you let her remain ignorant of the fact that her identity was known?”

"Yes, why shouldn't I? She wished to remain unknown; why should I deprive her of that pleasure?"

"Humph! what does a girl know of what she wants? Joanna needs a husband who will exert his authority. A young woman beautiful, accomplished has no business to shut herself away from society. Going about the world doing good!—it's arrant nonsense. She ought to be doing good in a home of her own—it's the proper place for her.

"We crucified One, once, for going about doing good and we have been doing it ever since—I'm afraid we always will.

"The world does not love reformers—we don't want to be reformed for that means to give up our pet vices, to dress decently, to live decently, to admit we are failures and set out resolutely on the road difficult. Oh, no! the world will never reform—it's easier to be wicked. That accounts for my social prestige, for the difficult I abhor."

Hogden laughed.

"You laugh!" Then the expression changed and the handsome old face quivered with feeling. "I didn't mean to talk so, Richard, I would be good if I could—you know I am not really bad at heart."

With an expression of mingled amusement and tenderness, Hogden waited for the next words.

Mrs. Hunter's gaze was absently fixed on the shifting scenes of the street.

"I have thought much since Joanna went away—she was with me the winter following her debut—you were in Baltimore at the time. She thought only of the poor, the rich could take care of themselves, she said—but they can't. I'm sure the Lord would make no distinctions."

"That would depend on how deeply dyed you are," said Hogden with mock gravity.

"Be still! Richard, you shall not laugh at me when I am taking my first steps,—but it is wicked, Godless, laughter, I need not mind if you do."

"I won't laugh—I'm deeply interested," but Hogden's expression belied the first half of his declaration.

"I shall retire from society and yield my place to my rivals."

"Bravo! What's in the wind—your scepter getting heavy?"

"I'm growing old——"

"Really! I shouldn't have thought it."

"You flatterer! But I like to hear it, Richard, I wonder if that is the inheritance we have from Mother Eve? It's a serious handicap, and we all have it except Joanna. I want Joanna."

"I begin to see the light. It's for this that I am seized upon in the street, and threatened, if not with loss of life, at least my piece of mind. I suppose I'm dense, but why didn't you keep Miss Lester when you had her?"

"Our theories of life didn't agree. She thought I was a frivolous old woman, and I am, or rather I was—I say it advisedly. And she went away to avoid a lover—a middle aged gray haired lover, but he was the greatest catch of the season. The women were all mad about him—all but Joanna—and she thought I favored his wooing.

"You needn't look at me in that manner, Richard, I teased Joanna by allowing her to believe so, but it was one of the last things I desired.

"I must let you go," said Mrs. Hunter, consult-

ing her watch, "One word more. Have you seen your father, Richard?"

"Not for a long time, and then it was quite by accident, I was coming up town, with my car, while he was going down. If he recognized me he gave no sign."

"I would be so glad—oh, so very glad if he could be reconciled to your choice."

"So would I, Mrs. Hunter. I have tried too, but with no success. I thought perhaps, when he learned I had not wasted my years, things would appear in a different light; but there seems to be no change in his point of view."

"No," said Mrs. Hunter sadly, "he was so of old. But I have a plan, Richard. No, I'll not tell you—on second thought,—it seems best to keep it to myself; but don't let Joanna escape me."

"Nonsense! I have no notion of match-making—I believe you are in love with her yourself, Richard Hogden."

Hogden raised his hat in gallant reply as his car moved away.

The eyes which followed him were full of maternal pride.

"You think I don't guess your secret, Richard Hogden, but it's plain as the nose on one's face. If Nellie could see it all—How strange I always think of him as Nellie's son, and not of that other woman. Poor Nellie, and you have been lying under the daisies there for forty years."

Mrs. Hunter hastily drew pencil and paper from her bag and wrote a brief note. Directing her chauffeur to leave her there, she gave him the note to deliver.

"You may return in half an hour."

Very leisurely, Mrs. Hunter ascended the marble steps; she needed time to perfect her suddenly devised plan.

An old and pompous butler took her card. While waiting, her keen eye noted how little change had taken place since she last had crossed that threshold. It had been a long time. "Humph! Pamela Hogden has bitten off her own little nose."

She followed the maid up the wide stairway and was ushered into a room the carpet and furnishings of which, were of such a deep brilliant blue, the ceiling and walls so glaringly white, that Mrs. Hunter described the effect as "ghastly." She did not at first discover the occupants, they being a part of the color scheme.

The elder of the two ladies was clad in a negligee of blue velvet and white fur, "atrocious," was Mrs. Hunter's mental comment.

"Why have you shut yourself up between four walls, Pamela Hogden on such a glorious day?"

The person thus addressed arose languidly and moved as languidly forward to greet her visitor.

"Elizabeth Hunter! I hardly knew you. How white you have grown."

"Yes, but as handsome as ever, you must add that Pamela."

"One doesn't care for such things at our age."

"Stop!—not another word—you speak as if we ought to have been buried long ago. I am young, Pamela Hogden—and I glory in my youth!"

Mrs. Hogden smiled faintly, "You always had peculiar views. I put aside my youth long ago."

"The more shame for you to rust out here."

"How could you! People are so unfeeling," said Mrs. Hogden, sinking into a chair and putting a daintily scented handkerchief to her eyes, "when one has a great sorrow——"

"Great Fiddlestick! I have had a great sorrow, too."

"But your son is dead."

"And where is your son?" was on Mrs. Hunter's tongue, but she wisely left it unsaid.

"I didn't come to quarrel with you, Pamela, I am a bearer of good tidings."

On hearing this announcement, the young lady who had been sitting near the window, lay down her paper and looked at Mrs. Hunter.

"Come here, Harriet, dear, and meet Mrs. Hunter."

"This is my son's affianced wife. Dear Harriet, she is a great comfort to me in my shame and sorrow."

"So this is the lady! Poor Richard! Not while there is a breath of life in my body! was Mrs. Hunter's vigorous, but somewhat incoherent thought. Outwardly, she smiled graciously.

"I have long wanted to make your acquaintance. Your aunt has often spoken of you."

"If people only knew how dear she is, they would not censure her so harshly for my son's faults. And again the handkerchief was called into requisition.

"Better 'let sleeping dogs lie,' Pamela, all is past and gone, it is well, now, to look to the future."

The handkerchief came down with a jerk.

"I would like to know what comfort there was in that? Richard would be as obstinate now as he was then."

"Praise the Lord!" but Mrs. Hunter's fervent ejaculation was not audible.

"My dear Pamela, let's drop such a fruitless discussion and consider the good tidings of which I spoke."

"Some one spoke to me, the other day, of your need of a companion——"

"When was that?"

"Why, let me see—I think it was at Mrs. Smith's musicale."

"I can't conceive how anything like that got abroad. Mrs. Revel was here, and she thought I ought not to be alone so much. Harriet was not here then."

"Is Miss Lovell to remain with you?"

"Not long—Hogden can't abide her presence. That is so like a man! If he finds it hard to be thwarted by his son, what must it be for me?"

"Well, I have found a most delightful companion for you," said Mrs. Hunter returning with new enthusiasm to the attack.

"Indeed!" was the languid comment, "Who is she?"

"Her name is Lester, a very beautiful and accomplished young woman."

"Ah, indeed! These beautiful and accomplished ones are so selfish, and so intent on their own pleasure."

"My Miss Lester is a notable exception, she goes about the world doing good."

"Really! That is the usual excuse of meddlesome people."

"You cat!" was Mrs. Hunter's inward reply, outwardly, she laughed placidly.

"I shan't put that cap on, Pamela, for I don't think it fits."

Mrs. Hogden smiled indifferently and drew the silken scarf about her shoulders.

"When can I see this Miss—Lester, I think you said? I should want to see her, of course before I decided to take her."

"Oh, I don't know really, she is a very busy woman."

"Indeed! Where is she now?"

"She is acting as nurse just at present, in the hospital."

"Oh, a nurse."

"I repeat, she is now serving in that capacity, but she is a very extraordinary person—quite a genius in fact."

"Oh, indeed! I think that I should like to see her."

"I will gladly be the bearer of your message, if you wish?" said Mrs. Hunter rising, "but, when I spoke of her I had no thought for any immediate action—she is greatly occupied with her work."

"Must you go? It is pleasurable but also very painful to meet old friends. I hope you will excuse my neglect; I rarely go out, my health does not permit."

"Harriet, dear, will you go down with Mrs. Hunter? It might be well to leave Miss Lester's address with me," she added.

But Mrs. Hunter was engaged in animated conversation with Miss Lovell and did not hear aright—or did her ear purposely deceive?

"Oh, yes, I'll remember," she called back, "good bye."

"I am so glad you called," said Miss Lovell, Aunt Pamela needs diversation. She is quite difficult to entertain at times, this morning has been a trying one."

Miss Lovell spoke with a peculiar soft drawl.

"Who is this Miss Lester—I think I have heard that name?"

"It's quite likely—oh, my car is waiting—good bye."

"Poor Joanna! she said aloud, as the car moved on, "poor innocent! But it is all for Richard's sake."

"And the Lord gave that woman a son! How inscrutable are the ways of providence. I wouldn't have trusted that woman with a son, not for one day! But what am I that I sit in judgment; if we received our just deserts, how many of us would be found worthy of the children we bear?"

Mrs. Hunter suddenly signaled the chauffeur to stop. A plainly dressed woman and little boy were passing a shop window brilliant with fruits and flowers. The child pointed wishfully at them, but the mother gently drew him on.

Mrs. Hunter alighted hurridly from the limousine and filled the wondering child's hand with coin.

"Buy him all he wants," she said, "Just to please me."

And noting the look of dignified astonishment on the woman's face, she added, "I had a son once, and—I haven't any now.

"I couldn't help it," she said contritely. Glancing back through the window she saw the pair enter the shop.

"Joanna is responsible for that—she taught me.

Oh, I am a wordly useless woman! But if I could have—" The sudden tears shone in Mrs. Hunter's dark eyes. "I shall,—there is no "if" about it," she said, brushing them aside. "We will see, my Joanna, if you escape me again."

CHAPTER VI

Which

Stephens was getting well.

"At this rate you will leave us in a week or two," said Hodgen.

"You think so? I've taken a sort of fancy to the place—I think I'll stay."

"You needn't count much on working us with that plea—out you go, neck and crop, at the appointed time."

"You would hardly, turn a sick man out of doors, would you?"

"Oh, no, we turn no sick men away."

"Well, I feel it will be some weeks yet before I really get on my feet again."

Hodgen looked about Stephen's room. No need to ask, is he an artist? it was an evident fact. He had his own mind about Stephens desire to remain, but he said nothing.

Stephens had become so occupied and entertained he had forgotten he was in a hospital—and in leaving, he left Joanna.

His divorce suit had dropped into the back ground of his memory. Indeed, it affected him so little the officer of the law could not forbear an ironical remark. "Don't seem to have shattered his constitution much after all."

But Hogden kept his own counsel. To him, his patient's increasing cheerfulness and evident satisfaction, was like the rasping of a sore. Why should he (Hogden) tamely submit to being robbed of his happiness.

Sometimes he wondered at Joanna's lack of discernment, but she would learn the character of the man in time—she couldn't help it, if only it would not be too late!

But Joanna was too busy to search for the inner motive of others, or to think of her own. She had come to Stephens' aid as a mother comes to a sick child.

To the past she never referred and seldom allowed herself to think of it. Stephens, however, persistently tried to revive old memories and it required considerable skill, on her part, to keep him from that dangerous subject.

She wondered—in those rare intervals when she allowed herself to think—if she could be the Joanna of those earlier days? She shrank from their memory—not because they were so painful, it was more a feeling of regret that love which had promised so much could prove so little.

She did not love this new Stephens, for him she had only a great pity, and a desire to help him to find a new and happier life. When she thought of him as being that other Stephens, once loved and lost, her breath came a little quicker but there was always a hurt in the memory and she invariably put it from her. She realized that Stephens had said no word of his neglect but she also knew that it was partly her own fault—she would not let him, had effectually checked him when ever he had made the attempt.

Joanna did not mistake her feeling for him. She knew, if it had not changed, what she most desired would have been to know the reason of his neglect of her.

She was not quite sure if she were right in keeping him from any reference to the past. Might he not have some good reason for the course he had taken? If so it was rank injustice to condemn him unheard.

Nevertheless she shrank from an explanation. It might sever their friendship forever and for the present at least, she could help him—and he needed her.

He had broken faith with love—with art—there remained for him, in life, but the supplying the necessities of food and raiment. Which is, when you think of it, but a very small part. Yet how often we let it constitute all there is!

When Stephens began to suspect that the past was to be a tabooed subject, he at once began to search for a cause. Had Joanna transferred her love to another? He was forced to admit, it was what he might expect, but the thought affected him like a cold douche. If he had needed her in those old days, he needed her doubly now. His behavior had been rotten—there was no need to go over all that again—he had had his lesson and he would atone as far as he could if she would let him.

"You are the same Joanna," he said to her one day "but you are not the same—that paradox has a great deal of truth in it."

"I am not good at guessing riddles—won't you please explain?"

"You are more beautiful—if that were possible—

but, when I think I have the old Joanna and can unburden myself freely as I used to, I find I am mistaken in the lady, she is superior to all needs of the flesh and I poor devil, must talk of impersonal things!"

"That isn't meant as a compliment is it? I didn't know I was so formidable?"

"I thought," said Stephens slowly and deliberately, "You and I had passed the stage of mere compliments, long ago."

"There now, I've hurt you," as Joanna first flushed and then paled, "I'm sorry, but you hold me off so—am I never going to have a chance to tell you what a damned ass I made of myself?"

"But—why need we bring up the past?" began Joanna in distress.

"It seems rather necessary to bring it up unless—you would forget it entirely?"

"Let us forget it."

Stephens hesitated, he wanted to stand as high in her estimation as possible, but if she wished the past to be past, what could he do? Besides was there really anything he could say for himself?

He was content to shelve the matter and only on one other occasion did he refer to it.

Joanna had earnestly endeavored to persuade him to fulfill the ambition of his youth, namely, to become a painter of nature.

"I wonder if anyone as black as I," he began unsteadily, "could hope——"

"I think," said Joanna gently, interrupting, "the past should be but stepping stones to higher things, think of it only in that light. The past is past, the future is *everything*."

Stephens attempted a reply but choked.

"Art should have a higher—a larger place, perhaps than it does."

"Joanna, you are the best woman, that ever lived," said Stephens finding his voice.

His reply was a merry laugh.

"Let's not allow our facts to be affected by our sentiments."

"What are our facts?" queried Stephens, somewhat ruffled.

"Our facts are, that woman—"Best women," if you will—are a legion."

"Well, I have a right to my opinion, I suppose?"

"That is one of the special privileges allowed to patients."

"Indeed! Such liberality is rather overwhelming but if I have a right to my own opinion is there any harm in sometimes expressing it?"

"Oh, no,—no harm," replied Joanna, feeling for once, at least, she was thoroughly routed, "we like to humor our patients."

Stephens made a wry face, "Humor our patients—I like that! We are trussed and skewed till our own mothers wouldn't know us, I am glad to learn it is done to humor us—I have often wondered why."

Joanna laughed.

"Don't go?" pleaded Stephens, as she arose, "it's not safe to leave me alone, really;—I might even fancy I could paint a picture."

"Of course you will—might I say I told you so."

"Yes, you might—ninty-nine out of a hundred would—but you won't, Joanna, the sound of the last trump, and rumbling of earth's final dissolution wouldn't surprise me more."

"How perfectly ridiculous."

"And you will probably think, what I shall say next, is ridiculous, too."

"Then I wouldn't say it."

"I will—I'll not be bullied any longer—I'll——"
But Joanna with a laughing protest, had fled.

What had she expected to hear that had changed dignified retreat into a rout?

Joanna met the question squarely, she had avoided it long enough—too long perhaps. Did she love Lynn Stephens? If she did not, would it not have been kinder to have left him to fight his battles alone? To neither of the disturbing queries could she give an answer, which silenced all doubt; and the more she thought of them the more perturbed she became.

It availed nothing to say the love for Stephens was dead. She knew it was—the ideal love of which the poet sang. She had locked it in her heart to await the touch, perhaps, of the infinite hand.

Meanwhile, here was this human wreck, or if he was not a wreck, he was dangerously near it—might she not be able to help him to find the better self which he had thrust aside? And with its return, might not the renewal of old ties follow?

The present condition of things could not go on, without injustice to both. And how could she leave him to himself? He seemed so helpless.

As a relief from perplexing thought she became more than ever occupied with her duties.

"How came you here, Miss Lester?" asked Hoggden finding her bending over the cot of a wailing child.

Joanna looked up, startled.

"I—I couldn't sleep, so I came to help Miss Greene,—I have done this before," she added as if in excuse.

"H—m," said Hogden in his grimmest manner, "How much longer do you intend to persist in insubordination?"

"You know I don't mean that," in genuine distress, "I am troubled and this is a relief—may I not stay?"

Hogden continued to look grim. "Get your wraps and come to the office," he said.

Joanna, wondering much obeyed, she hardly thought he would turn her into the streets at night, but his evident displeasure hurt her—if he would only understand.

Entering the office she found Hogden awaiting her bag in hand. He offered no explanation but helped her into the car, gave his directions to his chauffeur in low tone and took a seat by her side.

Joanna was filled with the liveliest curiosity, but Hogden sat imperturbable. She stifled her desire to ask the meaning of this night-ride and waited with what patience she could command until he should choose to reveal it.

Once in passing a brilliantly lighted saloon, she saw his face.

"What is it?" asked Hogden as she caught her breath.

"I—it was your face—you looked——"

"Wait please,—was that a compliment? If it was, don't omit any phase of it. If you meant something else, break it as gently as you can."

Joanna had a strong desire to shake him, in spite of the futility.

Dragging her forth on this night errand, letting her nearly perish with curiosity, he began now, quite at his ease, to tease her by pretending to think she had given him compliments.

"Did I hear aright?— I thought it was only feminine ears, that could be so tickled by the sound of a compliment."

"The love of admiration is a feminine failing. This I can only infer?"——

"Your inference, for several reasons, would be incorrect. Your expression suggested the look Sir Galahad's face must have worn when the holy Grail was in sight."

"H—m" was all the comment this explanation elicited.

Joanna checked a mischievous impulse to lean forward and peer into his face.

"Have you no mercy?"

"Mercy is one of the divine attributes—yes, I hope I have it."

How long would he persist in this ridiculous evasion?—perhaps they would presently find themselves back again at the hospital. She looked out upon the street but all was unfamiliar, she was as ignorant of where they were, as she was of why they came.

"We are almost there," said Hogden who had noted her look.

The car presently, stopped.

Taking his bag from the car, Hogden took Joanna by the arm, "we have some distance to walk," he said.

It was evident to Joanna, they were making for the heart of the red-light district; each turn they made took them into dirtier, noisier streets.

The hour was the harvest time for the dens of vice. Joanna shrank closer to Hogden's side, as a group of half intoxicated men went by singing a ribald song.

Hogden's grasp tightened on her arm, he increased his pace a little and Joanna became aware how carefully she was being directed over the uneven pavements.

They made one more turn.

"Close eyes and ears," said Hogden, "and forget the sense of smell," he added, as they passed a neglected sewer, "this place has been called 'hell.'"

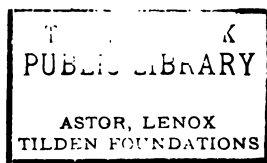
Dirtier and narrower the streets—could human beings dwell in such a place?

It seemed to Joanna that every door was a den of vice which was receiving new arrivals or vomiting forth its intoxicated prey—men, women and even children.

At last Hogden paused.

From some part of the building, before which they stood, came the sound of a fiddle of only two strings, and those two strings seemed to be trying to shriek out all the anguish of the instrument in its degradation. From the lighted lower windows the sound of drunken laughter and feminine screams and giggles, greeted their ears. Hogden swung back the door, she involuntarily seized his arm, for they were in the darkness. But only for a moment, the light of his lantern revealed a narrow hall, a flight of stairs at the end.

"Take hold of my coat," he commanded, "both hands, and don't let go, not for an instant!" Then with lantern in one hand and bag in the other he moved forward.





“ I think this is the place, said Hayden ”

To Joanna's shrinking senses, it seemed an endless journey through dark or dimly lighted halls, up rickety stairs, over rotten and broken floors. She gasped for pure air, but there was none, her head reeled with the reek and stench of the place.

Sometimes Hogden rapped at doors and inquired for the sick woman. Though the inmates were often too drunk to answer intelligently, their replies were given with some degree of respect. Joanna marveled. Speechless, she followed him, with fingers holding his coat in such a fierce grip, they ached. His caution was needless, she would not have released her hold more than the drowning man his clutch on his bit of board.

"I think this is the place," said Hogden as they were making their way along a hall where the floor contained yawning chasms. A faint moaning came from the half opened door ahead. Hogden flung it wide and entered.

The room was dimly lighted by a smoky lamp. On the floor lay a young woman, partly covered by a ragged and filthy blanket, a newly born baby lay on the floor at her side, it had opened its eyes on this world but to close them again forever.

Joanna looking at it felt a throb of thankfulness—death was so much kinder than life.

Crouching over a bundle of clothes in the corner, was a shriveled, disheveled old crone. The wretched woman started up as they entered.

Hogden bent over the mother.

"She has gone," he said straightening up.

The old woman hobbled towards him.

"At your old tricks, I see."

Again Joanna wondered to hear him thus address the human wreck.

The face was bloated and disfigured, she mouthed her words in a disgusting manner.

"It ain't my fault if there wa'n't no doctor provided—you didn't git here."

"No, I didn't get here, but I came as soon as I could."

"There ain't nobody paid me—not—a red cent."

Hogden gave her a small coin, which the crone seized avariciously, and gathered up the bundle of clothing.

"I've helped her a heap, 'tain't more'n my just dues."

Hogden nodded motioning her away.

Joanna went to the lifeless pair on the floor. She laid the babe on its mother's breast and covered them as well as the meager covering would permit, her tears wetting their faces meanwhile, but she was not aware of her tears.

Lifting the long yellow hair of the young woman, from the floor, she drew it lightly across the naked breast.

"Come," said Hogden, "there is nothing more you can do."

Joanna stood and looked at the silent pair. She began to unfasten the long coat she wore, but Hogden stopped her.

"What is the use of that? They are beyond cold and nakedness now, come!"

Mutely she obeyed. Grasping his coat as before, together they retraced their way through the reek and grime, to the street.

Dropping his lantern into one of his capacious pockets Hogden took Joanna's arm. Still speechless she moved automatically whither he directed.

Each moment seemed to have added to the throng in the street. They flitted across Joanna's vision, a horrid phantasmagoria.

One, bolder than the rest, stopped in front of them.

"I say fellar, ye couldn't tell me the time of day, could ye?"

"Have a care, Fritz," said Hogden sternly.

The young man leaped to one side.

"I say, I didn't know 'twas you 'doc,'" he called after him in a respectful tone.

What manner of a man was this, that the inhabitants of this nether world obeyed him? Thrice that night she had witnessed it. The wonder of it pierced through all her dull misery.

Safe in the car, Joanna realized that she was crying, she turned up her coat collar to conceal her face, and sat silent.

Hogden noticed her movement and suspected its cause. He drew one of the warm rugs about her and began talking, as if to himself.

"Such little things seal our fate sometimes. A careless word, a forgotten message. Perhaps I might have saved her, but who can say?"

"I have been searching for her for some weeks. It's a pitiful story. We doctors meet with so many such cases, we are moved to cry as did Israel of old, how long, oh, Lord, how long!"

Joanna listened breathlessly. She was seeing the real man as she had never seen him before.

"It's strange," mused Hogden after a pause, "that the feminine mind never can be made to realize, that the subjugation of man is like horse-breaking—both brutes are likely to prove intractable."

"This girl left a comfortable home, a fond but too indulgent a mother, that she might have a larger field for her special vocation, namely, the bewitchment of men's senses, or the breaking of their hearts—if they happen to have one to break.

"We have just seen the result, and there are thousands of such. It is usually the women who are hurt in the game, yet still they play.

"I may be called a cynic, you may think, perhaps, I am hard on human nature, but hers isn't a case of love betrayed—it's a gamble. She gambled for the pleasures of the hour, the stake was her life and she lost, that is all.

"Women are inveterate gamblers. My lady has Tom, Dick, and Harry in different stages of befuddlement. She plays them against each other and wonders, 'will Tom blow out his useless brains? or Harry and Dick knife each other?' It's a very fascinating game—for her. A man is animated by much the same spirit when he stakes his money—yet, I wonder why—have always wondered—how she could stake so much against so little."

The car sped on.

Joanna waited for Hogden to finish his one sided conversation, but he seemed lost in thought.

She, too, was silent, but thoughts crowded fast upon her.

The dull horror of mother and child lying alone in the wretched room, forsaken and uncared for, still clung to her. Why had Hogden taken her? Had he known what was in her mind and was this his answer? How absurd she was—how could he have known?

"Are you cold, Miss Lester?—I thought you shivered."

Joanna aroused herself, she was shivering, but she had no sensation of cold.

"We must be near the hospital. Oh, here we are. I thank you for coming, Miss Lester, your presence has been pleasant, though we were too late to bring our errand to a successful issue."

Yielding to his invitation, Joanna entered the office.

If Hogden had anything to say to her, it was not at first apparent. He walked about aimlessly for several moments.

Joanna sat down with a forboding of evil at her heart.

"I never knew a woman to keep still so long—I didn't suppose it was possible."

She arose and swept back her cloak from her face.

"How long have you been doing this?" she burst forth impetuously.

"Visiting the slum district? I began the practice of medicine there."

"Oh, that is why they obey you?"

Hogden smiled, "I have never been troubled by any excess of that sort."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

He came nearer.

"Would it have made any difference to you, Miss Lester?"

"I"—Joanna hesitated, "I would like to help you," she said.

Turning away Hogden paced the floor to the window, then back again.

"Why did you leave a career which promised both fame and competence for this?" with a wave of his hand towards the hospital.

"Did you know?" Joanna's tone expressed her surprise.

"Did you think I didn't? New York is a small place for some people to hide in, Miss Lester.

"Why did you come here?"

"Because I wanted to be happy."

"I venture to say, you are the first person that ever came here, to look for happiness—let us hope you found it."

"I have in a measure."

"I am glad. Will you give me your definition? I, too, may wish to look for it."

"Your definition is better than mine."

"My definition!—Who told you I had one?"

"You did."

"When?"

"To-night—actions speak louder than words."

"Please interpret my actions."

"Then give to the world the best you have, and the best will come back to you."

"That's a lie! said Hogden fiercely.

"Oh, cried Joanna, wincing as if he had struck her.

"Forgive me, Miss Lester, I'm a brute. It was a tender spot you hit, but I'm repentant now."

"And what you said was not true?"

"Must I say that?"

"I wish you would."

"And what I said was not true," repeated Hogden, promptly.

His manner forced a smile from Joanna.

"I'll go now—good night."

"Wait a moment."

Joanna waited.

"Are you ready to leave the hospital?"

This is what it was, then—her forebodings had proved true.

"Why must I go?"

"I didn't say must—I met Mrs. Hunter not long ago——"

"Oh," and with the word vanished her burden of fear.

"She needs you, Miss Lester, you had best return to your world and your work."

"But this is my work—and why do you speak of 'My world'—there is only one which holds us all."

"Do you suppose you could convince some people of that?"

"I shall not try—I don't see that it matters."

"Well, we will leave that question for future discussion, but I think you owe it to yourself, perhaps, to others, to return to your career."

"But if I choose to stay? Oh, you will let me stay?"

In her earnestness Joanna drew near to Hogden and laid her hand on his arm.

"You will let me stay?" she repeated.

He was looking down at her from under half closed lids; suddenly, they lifted. It seemed to Joanna that fires, which could be felt, leaped from his eyes and scorched her cheeks.

"I shall not send you away if you wish to stay," he said.

CHAPTER VII

A Broken Tie

"At last!" Stephens arose from his knees and carried the canvas to the light; the winter twilight had not appreciably, begun to lengthen.

Placing the picture on an easel, he lighted a cigar, threw himself into an easy chair and studied its features leisurely.

He had left the hospital two weeks before, Hogden counseled another week's stay, but the occasion was urgent and he reluctantly yielded. He found his strength unequal to the demands upon it, and was working intermittently. Mindful of his promise to Joanna, he was doing, what his strength permitted, in landscape painting.

His search that afternoon had been a long one, and he was greatly fatigued.

For sometime he studied the picture through puffs of smoke, making his criticisms and comments aloud.

"The best of my earlier work. As a portrait, now, it's good—distinctly good. That pose is perfect, but Joanna always was perfect."

As his interest increased he put aside his cigar. "Blest, if roses like that wouldn't be beyond me now, as a whole it's not badish, I wonder If I might——"

He arose quickly, rather too quickly, for his face betrayed twinges of pain; taking brush and palette, he approached the picture and made a few daring touches, stepping back occasionally to note the effect.

He painted for nearly half an hour and then settled back into his chair with a sigh of exhaustion.

"The deuce take it! How little strength I've got."

Opening his eyes after a short interval, he looked at the picture.

"Gad! it's even better than before—I was afraid I had lost it."

The twilight deepened, Stephens' face shone out of the shadows, thin and white and aged. His eyes rested on the picture, the outlines of which were dimly discernible in the gathering darkness.

"Ten years ago—God! but I have traveled far since then."

The striking of the hour aroused him. He arose, donned coat and hat and left the house, locking the studio door behind him.

The little restaurant was nearly empty when Stephens entered. He was making his way to his own particular corner, when a bearded young man arose and warmly grasped his hand.

"This is great! When did you come back to this merry world? You look like the five years dead. Come sit down with me, I have the table to myself this evening."

"Thanks, I'll gladly sit—my confounded legs refuse to carry me."

"But I'm mighty glad to see you! Should have been up before this, but have been out of town my-

self. The governor was sick and I have been at home for more than a month. It looked rather dark for the 'old gentleman' at first, but he pulled through. I saw Fulton yesterday, and he said you were at home. The fellows are glad to have you back, but there seems to be an unusual number out of town just now."

"Well, and how does it seem to get back into the harness?"

"It's good to get back if——"

"Yes, of course, I know," said Bruyere, with some embarrassment, "the fellows wanted to send you a message of sympathy, Fulton said, but nary a one of 'em wanted to be the one to take it."

"Did they really think of me? Well, I'm grateful, but Eugene, I'm not so much to be pitied after all. It has been a mistake—God, what a mess I have made of my life! Take this from me—never marry a woman, who cares nothing for your art."

"I think that," returned Bruyere, gravely.

Both were silent for a few moments. Stephens idly traced a design on the table cloth, with his fork.

"I have wanted to see the boys and tell them I should drop out—I'm not going on with the work."

"Great Scott! do you mean you are going to abandon art?"

"No, indeed, old man," Stephens hastened to say, soothingly, "I am no longer a futurist—that's all."

"What has come over you, man, are you going to entirely abandon the ground we've striven for?"

"Yes, or put it this way, I leave it to return and even up old scores."

Bruyere looked at him thoughtfully, he was wondering what had produced the change.

Perhaps Stephens felt that some further explanation was due, for he added:

"When you go down to death's door, things appear in a different light, and I expect most of us, find we are not the fellows we thought we were."

"Long ago, I had ambition to be a landscape painter; it was one of the things I forgot, with others. And I am going back now, and make good some of my failures."

"I own you have surprised me," said Bruyere, after a pause, "I confess I have not been altogether satisfied with what we have done."

Their attention was given to the waiter, at this juncture, when they renewed their conversation, they did not begin where they left off.

"Do you mind telling me your plans for the future?" asked Bruyere.

"I haven't got as far as that. I shall fulfill my contract with Smith & Son—book illustrations—that will keep my head above water for a while."

"If we poor devils of artists were free to devote ourselves to art we might accomplish something."

"Yes, that's so, but we aren't likely to receive an everlasting fortune for kindness' sake."

"You bet we don't! We are gentlemen of leisure, we do nothing but paint."

"Julia Lendenning is back from the south, arrived yesterday—had you heard?" questioned Bruyere, after dispatching the waiter with an order.

"No, I hadn't—peerless as ever, is she?"

"More so. She inquired about you and has

taken it hard, that all she has learned of your being in the hospital, is what she got from the papers."

"She was pretty thoroughly stirred up, I wouldn't wonder if she let you know what she thought."

Stephens smiled in the manner of a man who is flattered, but wishes to appear indifferent.

"Miss Lendenning, has been very kind, I appreciate her favors." Then remembering his disappointment when he discovered that she, and not Joanna, was the giver of the roses, he grew suddenly grave—he had forgotten Joanna.

The then and now were so far apart, the Stephens of the past and Stephens of the present were separated in like manner by time's changes he was finding it somewhat difficult to adjust himself to his surroundings, and to evolve a new Stephens of the future.

Would it not be better if he explained the situation and thus avoid future misunderstandings?

Stephens was mentally debating the question while listening to Bruyere's various bits of gossip.

"I have some news for you," he said, speaking lightly, and feeling dissatisfied with himself because he did so.

Bruyere looked his interest.

"I,"—Stephens grew grave again. "Most men make fools of themselves sometime in their lives, my asinine period occurred at the beginning of my career. There was a girl then, who might have made more of a man, of me—did make what there was.

"Now after a lapse of years I have found her again. I hope I have recovered my modicum of

sense, I certainly can appreciate what I lost through lack of it. She may not overlook the past,—I can't blame her if she doesn't,—but if she can, I feel that I can make good. I've played the fool and have myself to thank for it. I mean to turn over the leaf, now, and begin on a clean page.

"It's a thousand pities we never realize our blunders until after it is too late."

"You surprise me—I thought,"—began Bruyere in a sort of maze—"the lady was——"

"Miss Lendenning?"

"Yes, that was the general opinion."

"She didn't think so, I fancy. Miss Lendenning is one of the handsomest women I have ever known, a very fine girl; but as to marrying I never thought of her in just that light."

Bruyere looked disturbed.

"Would you?" asked Stephens, making a direct appeal.

"Yes, I would."

"Take heart man, you may be the lucky one, but believe me, the Peerless Julia has as many strings to her bow as Solomem had wives."

"She has an interest in art and a willingness to help a man, which artists, at least, ought to appreciate."

Perhaps it was Bruyere's evident feeling, or it might have been some memories of his own, which prompted Stephen's reply.

"She is all you say, and there has always been the kindest feeling between Miss Lendenning and myself. By the way, did Fulton get his 'Easter Lilies' accepted?"

The conversation drifted to other things.

"Let's go have a smoke," said Stephens, and the two arose from the table and passed from the room.

A few moments later, a young woman emerged from behind the screen of ferns which had separated her from the two at the table. That she had heard their conversation was certain, for her countenance gave evidence unmistakable. Her eyes held a lurid light, and her lips were parted in a peculiarly unpleasant smile, suggestive of pussy's worst mood.

Miss Lendenning had not sought the shelter of that screen, that she might listen to conversation, but to meet a degenerate son of a millionaire, whose moral code prevented him from meeting people in public, whose society, in private, he was quite willing to encourage.

The eavesdropping was quite accidental, but had Miss Lendenning known that she was to have been the subject of conversation, she would have placed herself there at any risk.

Standing erect, nervously drawing on her gloves, she might have presented an appearance of wounded dignity, but for the betraying smile.

A waiter was dispatched for a carriage, and Miss Lendenning withdrew from what was to have been a field of victory, wounded but not defeated.

If any one had asked her the reason of woman's existence and she had given them a truthful answer (which she wouldn't) she would have said "men." Men were born that women might subjugate them, hence woman was born to subjugate man. Miss Lendenning was too practical for ideals. If she had not been, hers must have taken the form of a beautiful woman before whom all men knelt. Nothing gave her such keen gratification, as the

sight of a prostrate man—that is, if it was at her own feet that he took that humble attitude, and not the feet of another.

Alone in the carriage her smouldering wrath burst into flame.

"You had never thought of her in just that light"—she hissed, "we shall see, Lynn Stephens.

"He shall not treat me like this—I swear he shall not! Who is this woman who has made him what he is? Haven't I made him what he is? I'll circumvent her somehow, she shall not have him."

And she sat herself down in her room to think.

His wife had been a cold-blooded creature. Pooh! she had been nothing! And she lingered gloatingly over her own power in that household.

Had she not stood Stephens' friend when his miserly wife abused him? To whom more than herself, did he owe allegiance?

Bruyere would marry her, would he? Most men would, that is, if they could. He would make a useful and willing tool, and she forthwith dispatched a dainty, perfumed little note requesting his presence early on the morrow, she wished to see him, he must not disappoint her. The occasion for this urgent request did not matter—she could think of a dozen things. Men invariably did her bidding and, if he loved her, his scruples would be easily overcome.

Many a woman has reasoned like-wise and to that fact is credited part of the world's tragedies.

In her little coterie of artists, Julia Lendenning had reigned supreme. But few of them were in society—society spelled with a large "S"—though fame or friend, sometimes, brought an invitation to a social event. But the thus honored one, always

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came back professing joy at his return to his own fold.

Several newspaper men had found their way thither also a few authors, imparting a certain literary tone to their "social set."

Besides knowing in the consensus of opinions, that she was a handsome woman, the bright particular star of her particular set, Miss Lendenning was a person of peculiar distinction—she was said to possess an absolutely faultless figure.

A faultless figure, if one took it too seriously, might lead to a false conception and its resulting train of evils.

Miss Lendenning worshipped her beautiful figure. It was for her an enviable distinction, it enabled her to wield the scepter she so loved to wield—a ruler of the hearts and minds of men.

The devotion to her beauty, kept her free from many of the excesses common to society. On the advice of her physician she eschewed wine and cigarettes, though she was fond of both.

Intimate friendship with her own sex, she did not desire, and she had none; nor did the social ladder entice her to set her perfect feet upon its slippery rounds, in hope of gaining its brilliant eminence. Her victory lay in depleting the ranks of admirers of those same social leaders, who would regard her an intruder in their circle, and in that spoke the primitive woman.

The acquisition of Bruyere to her circle, of admirers was a minor attainment. He lacked Stephens' suave worldliness, he was neither handsome nor the beatific creature a "ladies man." He bored her at times and now, that she knew he loved her,

she was inclined to rate him a fool for his supposition that he could win her love.

Bruyere, himself, was innocent of such a supposition, thinking that she belonged to another he had been content to admire her from afar. Stephens' declaration of intentions, had left him free to enter the lists if he chose and he subjected himself to careful criticism, finding little to commend him to one so far removed—one, who had long had the love and admiration of many more worthy than he.

The receipt of her letter requesting his presence, sent a little quiver of excitement through him, and, after a careful toilet, he presented himself as early as he deemed polite.

Miss Lendenning received him very cordially, her eye noting the little improvements in his toilet and it gratified her vanity, even while she pronounced him badly dressed. She, too, had given considerable thought to her dress and she flattered herself she had achieved the greater result. She wore a most charming negligee of pink, a bertha of soft white lace from which rose her beautiful shoulders.

Bruyere never saw her arms and shoulders uncovered (and they always were) without wanting to paint them, they were so smooth and dimpled and the white flesh looked as firm as if it had been chisled marble.

"I have not breakfasted," she said, "you shall share my breakfast with me."

And Bruyere presently found himself sitting opposite her, at a dainty breakfast table, watching her pour his coffee. He had long since eaten, but he loved to watch her white arms, and he ate another breakfast.

At first Miss Lendenning was too intent on the impression she was making to exchange more than airy nothings, but when the maid carried away the breakfast dishes she set her mental powers to work, to discover all Bruyere knew of Stephens' friendship with the fair unknown.

"Had he seen Stephens, and was he looking well?"

To which Bruyere replied "he had had a long chat with him only the night before, he was thin and pale, but professed to be feeling very well, only easily fatigued."

Julia Lendenning played with the bracelet on her arm. She wanted to go at once to the core of the matter, but something in Bruyere's slow dark eyes made her hesitate and feel her way.

"I wonder why you artists never marry?"

Bruyere seemed to be counting the threads in his hat band. "How small an income, do you suppose, a woman would be content with?"

Miss Lendenning gave a tinkling girlish laugh. "Is that what you all wait for?"

Bruyere raised his eyes and fixed them on her face. His slower wit was no match for hers—did she mean open encouragement?

But this was just what Miss Lendenning did not mean, at least, for the present.

"I was thinking of Lynn," she said, "how does he take his wife's desertion? I knew it would come to that."

Bruyere was more interested in his own affairs than he was in Stephens', but he answered easily, that in his opinion, Stephens was pretty well satisfied to have things as they were.

"He will probably marry again," she remarked, pulling the ears of her pet spaniel, Fonda.

"Yes, probably."

"That is just like you men," with a becoming pout, "it's no sooner off with the old love than it's on with the new."

"But if there was no old love it could make no difference."

"It could make no difference? Why you make me curious—is there really some one? Who can it be? Do you know?"

"No, I don't know," said Bruyere wondering if he betrayed Stephens' confidence if he admitted the fact that there was a prospect of a wedding.

"Can't you think of some one it might be?" queried Miss Lendenning, with charming innocence.

"No, my imagination doesn't lead me in that direction."

"But we mustn't let a delightful romance of this sort, escape us, we must find out."

This was what Bruyere dreaded, it seemed innocent enough, but would Stephens approve of this little fun at his expense?

"Give it up! Let him produce the lady when he will. He has been in the hospital for the last ten weeks, if she is not a myth, she must be miles away."

"What a chicken heart! Don't you suppose one could hide in New York? Why, we don't know our next door neighbors. I'll wager a new pipe against a pair of gloves, that I discover the lady."

Bruyere saw only harmless fun. He accepted the wager if he be allowed to select the pipe.

Finding that he really knew no more than she did,

Miss Lendenning was anxious to get rid of him, but first she must offer some explanation for his summons.

"Would he paint her picture? She had been dying to have it painted in some new and strange guise."

Bruyere left the house hardly knowing if it were the solid earth he trod, so dazed was he by this unexpected good fortune.

CHAPTER VIII

Does Not Unite.

"What did you say, Lynn?"

"I said it was never well to abandon one's ideals."

"And what do you mean by that?"

"Just what I said, or in other words, if you have an ideal in art toward which you are striving—keep on striving. To further elucidate, I had an ideal once,—it was a great, a grand idea. If I had clung to it, I might have made myself a name, by this time. But, no, I abandoned it, and have spent the years in fruitless dilettantism. I must now begin at the foot of the ladder and try again."

"I think, I don't quite get you—you mean that you are going to desert our crowd?"

"That's like a woman! No, I meant nothing of the sort. I have changed my line of work—that's all. Henceforth I devote myself to landscape painting."

Miss Lendenning watched Stephens as he made a few careless strokes with his brush. He was not the old Stephens—she was quick to discover that. And she was filled with a savage hatred of the something that had caused the change. Was it this woman?—"the fair unknown" Bruyere had called her.

Let her beware, Julia Lendenning was not easily beaten.

She drew a chair to Stephens' side and watched him at his work. A very innocent pastime, certainly, and the childish abandonment with which she gave herself up to the pleasure of watching him at work, had every appearance of innocence also, but Miss Lendenning had practiced for hours on that particular pose.

The cheek turned toward him was tinged with red owing to nature or consummate art. The wavy mass of dusky hair left only a bit of the ear exposed, the pure Greek profile stood out with the clearness of a cameo against the dark background, altogether it was a very clever bit of posing, well calculated to make an artist seize sketch book and pencil. But for some reason Stephens was obdurate, and he worked for a long time in silence.

Even beauty has its price and Miss Lendenning felt her muscles stiffen from the prolonged pose. She raised herself abruptly.

"One would think your life depended on that particular bit of work, Lynn Stephens."

"It does, or at least my bread and butter has its source therein which amounts to the same thing."

"Well, I object to such strenuous labor."

"You would have the bread without butter, eh? We artists are sometimes glad to get even that."

"I mean that one ought to take time for some of the pleasures of life. I haven't seen you for a long time," she added in a plaintive voice.

"Oh, that's the reason of your grouch, is it? Well, go ahead, you may do the talking and I'll listen. You see, this is contract work and must be completed at the specified time or S. H. and company, don't pay."

"I should think such work would kill all the genius an artist ever possessed."

"It isn't pleasant. But what would you? We are human and man must eat to live."

"I am glad to hear you say that, really. I have heard so much about ideals and 'Worth while creations' I was wondering if you hadn't become one of those creatures with wings."

Stephens looked at her, "poor child!" he said teasingly, "her plaything has become a grub and she thought it was a butterfly."

"No, I didn't, Lynn Stephens, spider would be more appropriate."

Stephens laughed.

"Not on your life! I am but the humble insect trapped in the web. And who's the web, fair lady? —tell me that."

Miss Lendenning pouted.

"It's useless to tell me the web is of my spinning, for I never catch anything."

"Hm!"

"Now, I wonder what that 'hm' means? It might mean uncomplimentary things?"

"What would you like to have it mean? That mere man falls powerless when touched by one of your gossamer threads?" he asked as she did not reply.

"That is very gallant flattery, but of course, I don't have to believe it."

"Oh, no, you don't have to believe it, but that which is self-evident, requires no belief."

"Why spin a web if it fails to catch the object for which it was spun?" she queried, after Stephens had painted several minutes in silence.

He looked at her smiling.

"That's a poser, but I can't conceive of any object—man included—strong enough to escape your snare, so, if you look closely, I think you will find him already caught."

"How nonsensical you are!" said Miss Lendenning arising and crossing the room.

"Where is that old portfolio? Ah, here it is!"

And seating herself, she began to look over its contents.

"No use looking there for anything of consequence; I sorted them the other day, the only thing of value is on the easel."

Miss Lendenning drew aside the covering and looked long at the picture, her face darkening meanwhile.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Stephens, as she did not speak.

"Who is the lady?"

"The 'queen of the roses.' "

There was a glitter in Miss Lendenning's eye, as she dropped the curtain concealing the picture.

"She is too much of a frozen saint for me. Who is she?"

"I told you."

"One of those ideals you have been prating about, I suppose."

There was an edge to Miss Lendenning's voice.

"She has to do with ideals, if anyone has," said Stephens soberly.

Miss Lendenning returned to her search. Jealous rage kept her silent, she was afraid to trust her voice, when she did speak it was in the manner of a petulant child.

"Where is that picture you painted of me, Lynn?"

"Which one, lady fair?"

"The picture of those dancing nymphs—'Love' was the title you gave it."

"Oh, that is over there in that green portfolio."

The slight change in his tone Miss Lendenning interpreted as disapproval, and it added fuel to her jealousy.

"When are you going to finish this, Lynn?"

"That? Oh"—Stephens was occupied at that moment—or he might have given a little different answer.

"I shall not attempt the nude any more."

"Don't you think this is as worthy of completion as that?"

The edge was again discernible in Miss Lendenning's voice.

"Oh, jealous are you? But you are still the faultless lady, only I paint nothing now but landscapes."

"Well, this has a landscape for a background."

Stephens laid aside his brush and turned to face her.

"Seriously, that picture has grave faults. If you would give it careful consideration, I think you would agree with me, that it is not one you would wish to give to the world."

"Why, what is the matter with it? You promised to paint me. If there is anything wrong, I could pose again."

"You know, I told you, I should not make use of the nude."

Miss Lendenning replaced the picture in the portfolio. She remained standing with her back toward

Stephens. He saw her give furtive dabs at her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Did you care so much?"

"I wanted to do something for you, too," she said still keeping her face turned away from him.

"You do much for me," said Stephens, touched "and you always have done. Have you forgotten the Greek statue? That was about the best thing I ever did."

But I wanted to be painted as a living, breathing human being. I liked this pose best of all—I really wish you would finish this picture."

Stephens was silent.

"You used to like this," the plaintive note had crept into her voice.

"Yes," Stephens spoke reluctantly, "I thought it a very fine sketch at that time, but there are grave errors in it."

"Then why not try again?—you promised."

"Why not let Bruyere paint you?"

"You know he hasn't your skill of expression, and I really think you owe a perfect picture to art."

"That is very true, but Eugene has improved greatly, and the work is more in his line."

"Then I am to understand you refuse to finish the picture?"

"Don't put it that way—I refuse because it is unworthy of you."

"But you won't let me pose again?"

"I have no hope that I could succeed in producing a perfect picture," said Stephens at last, hesitatingly.

Miss Lendenning was quick to perceive her advantage, also, to perceive that she would gain more by letting this matter drop.

She deftly placed her own picture over the "Queen of the roses" on the easel, with an exultant thrill of victory,—she had at least shut out the sight of that hated face.

She came back to Stephens' side.

"You aren't going to let this make any difference in our friendship, are you?"

"Not unless you wish it," said Stephens.

"You know I don't."

How should he know? Stephens did not like her assumption. He knew they had been skating on rather thin ice, but it was all for the exhilaration of the sport; he had thought she so understood it. What now, did she intend to convey?

Miss Lendenning was standing very close at his side, she touched his shoulder as she spoke.

"Something has changed you, Lynn, you are not the same."

"No man goes down to death and comes back quite the same."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough?"

"I asked you a question?"

"And I answered it," cried Stephens springing up, "Come, Lady Faultless, get on your hat and let's go to lunch."

They were a gay party. About the table were artists, actors, and journalists. Conviviality ran riot and mots flew about in a shower, but most of them were innocent of wit and fell harmless.

The younger of the two actors accompanied Miss Lendenning and Stephens went home alone.

"I shall have to cut this out," he said, as he fitted the key in the lock.

CHAPTER IX

The Ball

Mrs. Hunter had determined to give jaded society a grand finale, before the lenten season should end their pleasuring.

"To give one last opportunity for lovers," she said, "to declare themselves before the season closed." And to give the envious food for thought.

This social event should be unique, original and, a natural consequence, the most talked of affair of the season.

Among the special features was a game "who is who," which was far from being the simple thing it seemed, singers, musicians, old and new favorites, were to render their sweetest music, while concealed in cunningly contrived bower of palms and roses; and their listeners were to hazard a guess at their identity.

The winner in the contest would receive a pearl necklace if a lady, a gentleman would receive a gold headed cane with his monogram thereon.

But in the midst of her preparation, Mrs. Hunter's enthusiasm flagged.

"Oh, I would give it up," she sighed, "only I have gone too far. Is this what Joanna said would come upon me, when things began to assume their real proportions? I want Joanna."

And to the hospital she went.

"Mrs. Hunter!" ejaculated Hogden, when she walked into his private office unannounced.

"Yes, it's Mrs. Hunter, and I came to see if you had kept your promise."

"My promise! Dear Lady I never make promises that"—

"That you intend to keep, I suppose you would say. But listen Richard Hogden, I am no immature miss, to be cajoled with a smile—a promise is a promise—now produce the lady, I shall stay here until you do.

And Mrs. Hunter seated herself, looking so belligerent that Hogden laughed.

"But isn't this rather sudden, you will give me a little time of course?"

"No, no time at all. I told you weeks ago, if you are unprepared you have yourself to thank. I want Joanna, and I want her now."

"But if she should prefer to stay here?" teased Hogden.

Mrs. Hunter arose and looked regally, down upon him.

"Do you suppose your grubby old hospital, will hide beauty and genius forever?"

Then with a sudden change of manner she dropped into a chair by his side.

"Don't make it hard for me, Richard, I want Joanna—can't you make her come?"

"I am afraid my authority does not extend that far," returned Hogden smiling.

"But Richard," as Hogden turned to his desk, "You won't try to prevent her going?"

"No."

"Remember your promise," said Mrs. Hunter as Joanna entered the room.

And he stood, silently, listening to Mrs. Hunter's flow of persuasive argument, and thinking he knew how it would end.

"What can I say to her—won't you help me?" asked Joanna appealing to him.

"'Tis better so," replied Mrs. Hunter, "he is always upsetting my plans, come, Joanna, I tremble until I get you home; a thousand things might happen. Come I like not Richard's look, there's dagger, rope and rastbane in it—let's away."

"Am I to be thus summarily dismissed?" asked Joanna turning to Hogden.

"Pardon me, but did I dismiss you?"

"I am to come back then?"

"That rests with you, Miss Lester, it goes without saying that we will be glad to have you back."

"Oh, Richard! will you be still, come, help me down the steps, please, I feel the infirmities of age."

"Nay, you do but dream. Perpetual youth must have annointed you at birth."

"Dear boy! Now I shall forgive you for trying to keep Joanna away from me—and I expect you said it for that very reason. Never mind, I can't resist flattery."

"And oh, Richard!" called Mrs. Hunter as the car started, "come and share in our evening's triumph. Forsake your god of duty and worship, for once, at the shrine of pleasure."

Hogden lifted his hand in protest.

"Oh, come 'sober-sides,' she will be there," waving her hand to Joanna, "to initiate you in frivolity."

"There I go again," she sighed, "and I was going to be so good; but you and Richard are such dutiful people you put me in a ferment and I can't stay corked up."

The ball was all Mrs. Hunter had anticipated. Her dear four-hundred friends came, and exhausted their vocabulary in its praise. Their mental reservations, meanwhile, were such as these: "sly old cat, to give a ball at the eleventh hour, when we couldn't return the honor."

"Elizabeth Hunter was always greedy of admiration, but I really didn't expect this."

"No, but one never does know what to expect, especially of Elizabeth Hunter. She is quite resplendent to-night. It's strange some people will insist on wearing jewels which are not at all becoming."

Oblivious alike of jealousy and criticism, because she chose to shut her eyes and ears to them, Mrs. Hunter moved through the gay throng joining in brilliant repartee, making the sly ones expand, placing the dull ones where they obtained a maximum of comfort while inflicting a minimum of boredom.

"If I possess genius," she sometimes said, "it must lie in the power of making people entertain themselves."

And people were always entertained at Mrs. Hunters', though they sometimes went home and tore her to "rags and tatters" which is the usual way of confessing inferiority.

"Who is that our hostess has gone to meet—the young man there by the door?"

"That? oh, that is the discarded son of the king

of Wall street," replied an aged dandy, "a princely pauper."

"What's his name?"

"Who?—the king or the pauper?"

"Either will do—you said this was the son."

"The name is Hogden, they call the Wall Street king "the hog."

"Indeed!" cried the young woman, clinging to the aged dandy's arm "why, you must mean Uncle Herbert."

Her companion looked aggrieved, a niece of the ruler of Wall Street might be worth more consideration.

"Why didn't you tell me he was your uncle—er—I would have introduced you."

"Oh, it doesn't matter. He is the discarded son you say?"

"Yes. The young cub refused to marry the young lady his father had picked out for him and his father turned him out."

"He is a doctor, now, I am told. Unmarried?"

"Yes. He is never seen in society, I believe, except when Mrs. Hunter brings him out. A wonderful woman that."

Miss Lovell's interest in the conversation faded—she had found out what she wanted to know.

"I think such a friendship very singular, don't you?"

"Mrs. Hunter is—well, just a little provincial, it seems strange so young a man and uncle Herbert's son, too, should make such a choice."

The aged dandy looked critically at his companion.

Miss Lovell had quantities of ash colored hair,

which was arranged in the ultra fashionable mode—three projecting knobs at the back of the head—a style supposed to give its wearer, an appearance of youth, but in this case, it singularly failed. Her eyes were large and blue, with long lashes, which had a trick of dropping very often on her cheek where their curved beauty could be seen to the best advantage. The chin was most too prominent for beauty and the mouth completed the ruin of what, otherwise might have been a pretty face.

The aged dandy noted all with the eye of a connoisseur. He didn't want to live with Miss Lovell—no, not he—but it might be well to keep her angling a while for the sake of her connections. A niece of the Wall Street ruler,—that should be taken into consideration.

"Our gracious hostess has carried him (meaning Hogden) off to the dining room—shall we follow?"

And Miss Lovell, who had skillfully manoeuvred him into a secluded corner that he might have an opportunity of declaring his love and, incidently, mentioning his bank account, smiled sweetly, and, placing her hand within his arm, declared herself ready to accompany him to the dining room or even to the ball room.

Which manner of wit so charmed her companion he declared, with a graceful bow, "that it was to him, great pleasure to go anywhere with her."

After this little verbal skirmish, feeling highly delighted with themselves, for each claimed the victory, they joined in the general movement toward the dining room.

"Richard!" Mrs. Hunter was saying, "I had given you up, did you hear her sing?"

"I came in for the last of it. Divine, isn't she?"

"I think even I could be good, with a voice like that. You need not smile, Richard Hogden, you don't know how hard it is for we lesser folk. Do you know when you look like that, I long to pinch you? Propitiate me at once, by telling me how you like my gown."

"Superb! A wonderfully fitting vestment for the woman within. Why, what is the matter?—I thought to please."

"You foolish boy! I didn't deserve it, that was all, you and Joanna are so dreadfully in earnest. She moved me to tears by her singing. Tears! on such a night as this! Why, I wouldn't redden my nose with tears for the world."

"You didn't, I am ready to swear, it is a perfectly normal nose."

"Richard, have mercy, I am like an hysterical girl, ready to cry or to scream with laughter. I must get rid of you or my reputation as a hostess is gone forever. Do you know these people? Whom do you wish to meet?"

"I don't know many here present, privately, I don't care to, but I would like to see Miss Lester."

"She is in the library, you are as alike as two peas—those were her very words, 'she didn't care to know my guests.' Go, I wash my hands of you, but my eyes are open," she added significantly.

"I never expect to catch you napping." Was Hogden's retort as he disappeared in the direction of the library.

The library was Mrs. Hunter's favorite room,

and seldom used in her more important social functions; for, she said, she had no mind to share her domesticity with the public.

Feeling safe from intrusion, Joanna had sought the library. She wished to be alone to analyze her feelings this night of her reappearance in the musical world.

She was sitting on a low seat by the fire absently watching the flickering flames, and deeply ingrossed in her own thoughts, otherwise, she must have heard Hogden's entrance.

"I didn't expect such good fortune as this, to find you alone by the fire. Have you deserted the whirl and the rout outside?"

Joanna started to her feet at the sound of his voice.

"Have you come to reprove me because I am a deserter?"

"The pot can't, safely, call the kettle black. No, allow me to congratulate you on the possession of such good sense."

"Am I to return the compliment?" was the laughing reply.

"Then you can laugh?" said Hogden ignoring her question.

"Of course I can—did you think I couldn't?"

"I had never heard you, and I wasn't sure."

"How absurd! I wonder what strange anomaly—monstrosity perhaps—I appeared."

"Shall I tell you just what I thought?"

"No, I think not, at least, for the present. I am already heavily burdened by a momentous decision."

"Tell me about it—I think I can help you."

Joanna looked up at him. The words of one of

his patients came to her, "When I am laid under the knife, perhaps never to wake again, I want Dr. Hogden's face above me."

Hogden's nose was a little too roughly chiseled for beauty, his chin too stern, still he might pass for a handsome man, if one was not too exacting. But Joanna knew it was not that of which his patients thought. The comfort they derived from his presence had sometimes puzzled her, for he was often silent and preoccupied.

Looking into his face, she was suddenly aware of the reason for the desire of his presence. It was his invincible strength. He stood like a rock of refuge, against which the tempests of life beat harmlessly.

"Am I not to be told?"

"Let us sit," said Joanna; "it's a long explanation."

Yielding to Mrs. Hunter's persuasion she had discarded her usual dark robe, for soft white draperies, a single chain of pearls with an opal heart for a pendant—Mrs. Hunter's gift—hung about her neck.

Hogden watched the rise and fall of that opal heart at her throat, while Joanna's gaze was fixed thoughtfully on the fire. He had never seen her like this. She seemed remote from him, a new barrier between. She was not the hospital nurse, with whom he shared a spirit of comradeship.

The eyes under the dark over hanging brows gleamed, "he had saved her life,—nothing could change that fact."

"You asked me once," said Joanna arousing, "Why I abandoned my musical career, I have discovered it is a necessity, if I don't abandon it, it will abandon me."

"Perhaps I'm dull, I don't quite follow you—won't you please explain?"

"I'm not great in the musical world—I'm not even an artist, I'm only an instrument, and I need to be played upon—moved by the needs of my fellow humans—before I can utter a single real note."

"You are smiling, but you know what I mean."

"Art for Art's sake" touches in me, no responsive chord, I want to sing for something or somebody."

"If it is allowable, I would ask for whom you sang to-night?"

"To-night? Oh, it was for an ideal, I sang."

"Is that all the answer I am to have?"

"Yes, I think that is quite sufficient."

"I have no right to complain, but I can't feel that I am fairly answered; you denied just now that your motive was art for art's sake."

Joanna looked at him, saucily, provokingly. It was still another Joanna who, until now, he had not met.

"Alas! Mother Eve, that you didst so stamp the bane of curiosity upon our souls, that we bequeath it to our sons," she said while gazing soberly into the fire.

"What are you two old young heads talking about?" queried Mrs. Hunter, entering at that moment.

"One of the original sins—Miss Lester professes to believe I possess it."

"Humph! if it is only one, she must have lost count somewhere; but such topics are very much out of place to-night. I will remove Joanna and leave you to your own thoughts."

"Don't, I implore, anything but that!"

"Are they then so bad?"

"Perfectly diabolical."

"Oh, what can I have said!" cried Joanna.

"It is the things which are left unsaid sometimes, you know, which hang a man."

"Go on Joanna, they are waiting for you, leave Richard to me; he needs a drubbing, such as only I can give him."

Hogden looked up at her with a quaintly resigned smile.

"Go ahead."

In answer Mrs. Hunter seized him by his two ears and kissed him on the forehead.

"Come, we will hear Joanna sing, and then you may go, but you are to come on Friday, Richard, then we will have the evening to ourselves.

The door closed after them and quiet reigned broken only by the distant sound of applause.

Some rooms seem to have an atmosphere, almost a personality of their own. The quiet study seemed to invite one to its studious restfulness and escape the roistering outside. The clear luminous light above the study table was hidden under pink shades which bathed the room in a roseate glow.

Abruptly, from behind the curtain at the window, glided a yellowish, sinuous figure and Miss Lovell took the stand, vacated by the others, on the hearth rug. There was something peculiarly cattish about her movements as she looked about her.

Mrs. Hunter's writing desk attracted her attention and she crossed the room with her quick gliding motion, and stood looking down upon it with a look that omitted no detail.

A letter directed to Mrs. H. H. Hogden was lying face up. Gently raising, she turned it over—it was sealed.

Smiling disagreeably, Miss Lovell returned to the hearth rug.

For years she had hated Richard Hogden, though she had never before seen him face to face. She credited all her misfortunes, from the loss of a ring to her failure to make a brilliant marriage, to his refusal of her hand.

The sight of him roused her to jealous fury; standing with her back to the fire, looking at the chair on which he had sat, Miss Lovell solemnly declared that nothing—nothing should stand in the way of her revenge—like a worm she would crush him when she had the chance.

CHAPTER X

In Stephens' Studio

"And that is your decision, Joanna?"

"Yes,—don't think me ungrateful."

"I don't, but have you thought of what you are giving up? I don't mean the ease and the luxury—a life of inactivity would please you no more than it pleases Richard."

Did it matter very much to Dr. Hogden—her being pleased? And why was Mrs. Hunter continually coupling their names? In his presence, it would be very embarrassing.

Mrs. Hunter toyed nervously with her spoon for a moment.

"Please don't misunderstand me, I am casting no stones at anybody nor at the class of society in which you have chosen to cast your lot. You may find as wide a culture, as much grace of spirit there, as anywhere. I am well aware of our own deficiencies, that our way of looking at things is very superficial; but you must find refinement more general with us—if we must sin, we have learned to sin with decency."

Joanna smiled; resting her chin on her hand, she gazed absently at the canary in the window.

The two ladies were lingering over their breakfast in Mrs. Hunter's cheerful morning room. The

February sunshine streamed over the tessellated floor and the canary was trying to show his appreciation.

"I thought it all over long ago," said Joanna. "I love to sing, but I want to sing to those who need me most. Perhaps I am selfish—I am afraid I am—but I want people to want me."

"Do you think we don't?"

"No, I didn't really mean that, but I am only a luxury to you—not a necessity."

Mrs. Hunter stirred her coffee in thoughtful silence.

"You are partly right and partly wrong," she said presently.

"I shall not try to make you think that song for song's sake is reason enough for devotion to it; for, if you can use it to raise fallen and suffering humanity, who shall say that it is not the better reason?"

"But are you always to go on like this?—think a moment, Joanna—youth will not last forever, there will come a day, when you are old and like myself dependant upon those about you, for aid to endure your existence."

"I have thought of that too, I can't quite greet the unseen with a cheer, but I wait and work."

Mrs. Hunter suddenly arose, went around to Joanna's side of the table and kissed the waves of dark hair.

"Dear, if you are to return to that hospital, I shall take you. I am more resigned to your going because Richard is there. Do you like Richard, Joanna?"

"Doctor Hogden?—Yes I like him very much."

Joanna's tone was too frank to suggest any concealed feeling.

Mrs. Hunter seemed about to say something, but she left the room without saying it.

They had been driving for several hours. All of Fifth Avenue was in the streets. All were rejoicing that the storm had left them only a moderate fall of snow and they seemed bent on transforming it into black slush as speedily as possible.

In Central Park the snow lay in its pristine whiteness.

"We are white in places," said Mrs. Hunter, "and at heart we are not so black—not much blacker than you, dear Miss New England."

"We are not models of goodness."

"And it is just as well—I despise snow and ice saints."

"There is one who looks well in his cloak of snow," pointing to the statue of the pilgrim.

"Yes, he is in his native element—snow and ice."

"I've wondered sometimes how you and Richard, (you and Richard again) manage to exist; it would be so monotonous sometimes, just being good?"

"Doesn't it get monotonous sometimes, just being bad?"

"And think how free you are! I love freedom."

"Free? Arrant nonsense! You are the most burdened, duty-laden individual of my acquaintance."

"We might ride for another hour," she said consulting her watch, "but for your 'charity visit.'"

"It isn't a charity visit—it is made in the response to the request of a friend."

"Who is this artist of whom you spoke?"

"Lynn Stephens is his name."

"The Stephens that was recently divorced?"

"The same, do you know him?"

"I have seen his wife and he should thank his lucky stars that divorce is possible. Is he a friend of yours?"

"I knew him years ago. He left the hospital recently."

Mrs. Hunter looked thoughtfully at Joanna.

"I want to know him," she said.

"Why not call with me to-day?"

"I have spent much time already, showing the dear Public that I have found the lost songstress. I'll go home now and plot some more. Perhaps—yes, my curiosity is all consuming—I'll go in with you."

But Stephens was not in his studio, and the janitor knew not when he was expected to return.

"Perhaps I am early, I think I will wait, he must be in soon."

Mrs. Hunter said nothing, she was examining the pictures on the wall.

"Your artist friend is a little inclined towards fads, isn't he?"

"No, I mustn't stop longer, remember you are coming back to me the twenty-fifth—good bye."

"Yes, good bye."

Left to herself, Joanna became so interested in a collection of Stephens' earlier sketches she forgot the lapse of time.

How familiar were the bits of landscapes. The little New England Village nestling at the foot of the hills, "The Trysting-place"—she had given the picture its name—a winter scene, she, muffled

in a deep blue cloak, stood waiting, for a back ground, the snow laden branches.

Was it possible she ever looked like the girl in the pictures?

Her father's horse "Old Faithful" contentedly switched flies under the maple tree by the brook.

Much of the work was crude—boyish attempts in thought and color, yet she looked at them lovingly.

One of them caused a painful tightening in her throat. It was the sketch Stephens had made on the hill top when hand in hand, secure in their love, they had faced the future courageously.

For the moment all the old love for Stephens, seemed to spring up warm and living within her.

She hastily replaced the pictures and arose to her feet.

The little clock over the fireplace, told her, she had waited for Stephens for more than half an hour; something must have occurred to detain him. But she wanted to see him, and he might feel disappointed if she failed to keep the appointment—she would wait a little longer.

Stephens had written, "I feel proud of my work, it is the best thing I ever did, this sketch of you—'roses.' "

Joanna had some eagerness to see the picture, would it matter much to Stephens if he was not there to exhibit his work?

She crossed the room and lifted the covering from the picture on the easel. As her eyes rested on the canvas, she drew one quick breath and stood silent—she failed to note the perfection of form of which Miss Lendenning was so proud. The lascivious eyes of the nude female figure seemed to mock her.

"Oh!" groaned Joanna as she dropped the curtain
"Oh, are we ever like that! Ever like that!"

Her thought for the moment, was impersonal, then came the questions springing up, swift, insistent, each one stabbing a little deeper than the one before.

"Whose picture was this? Stephens had asked her to see his latest work—her picture—what did it all mean?"

How could any man paint a picture like this horror and call it love? What mockery! Could a man with such an ideal be trusted? She had trusted once—"Oh!" and Joanna's fingers clutched each other as the storm of grief, helplessness and despair swept over her.

The love that had come with the revival of old memories was ruthlessly snuffed out and with it, the hope that she could help Stephens regain the hold on art which he had lost.

To meet Stephens, in her present frame of mind, seemed intolerable. She left a note on his desk, saying "She had called, as requested, but had not found him."

On the street, Joanna walked on, conscious, only of a dull misery. She did not love Stephens, she knew that now, but for the sake of that old love, she wanted to help him back to the place which he had lost—help him to find the best in himself, and she had failed—miserably failed.

"Why?" she questioned despairingly, "Why"?

She was presently held in check by the crowd in front. Traffic going up town and traffic coming down had met and were vainly trying to separate.

Joanna stood patiently waiting, so busy, with her

own thoughts she was hardly conscious of what went on around her.

A party consisting of several ladies and gentlemen, issued from a restaurant in front. Joanna started as if touched by an electric battery.

Stephens was in the lead and clinging to his arm—there was no mistaking that face—was the original of the portrait on the easel, in his studio.

Joanna watched them dumb, helpless.

The crowd devided them, they turned and were soon lost to view.

Joanna became vaguely conscious that a policeman was looking at her curiously and she started to move on, when some one spoke her name. She turned, Hogden was holding open the door of his car.

"Come."

And Joanna went.

His car at that moment seemed the most precious of earthly refuges.

"Where do you wish to go, Miss Lester?" asked Hogden, after he had escaped the crowd.

"I was returning to the hospital."

"Well, we will get there in time. Perhaps, like Cinderella, you are not over anxious to return to your ash heaps after a day in fairyland?"

"You are to say only the very nicest things to me, please."

Hogden turned abruptly toward her.

"Won't you tell me what you would consider the nicest things?"

"I think I would like to be told that people were glad to see me and—I haven't altogether enjoyed my visit in fairyland."

"There is a punishment for all such, I believe.

You might confide in me—did you lose the wrong slipper, or did the right prince fail to find it?"

"It was even worse—the clock struck and I was Cinderella in my rags in that gay company."

"That was an appalling calamity, truly, but isn't there some other charm, a different set of fairies—there used to be in fairy tales—to appease the prince?"

"The prince was left out of the story."

"Worse and worse, I thought he was always in it."

"They gave you a royal welcome however, I am so pursued by the newspapers, I have thought, seriously, of stationing a guard outside my office door."

"I am so sorry! Is there anything I can do to rid you of the annoyance?"

"Oh, let it go on—I like it. I shall get to be the talk by and by; and a reflected brilliancy is better than none at all."

"I didn't think you were such a sophist—but you deceive yourself."

"What am I? A fashionable fad, at perihelion to-day, aphelion to-morrow?"

"That depends upon yourself," said Hogden quickly.

"I know what you mean but—I thought I made that clear before."

"From your view point, yes, but might there not be others? When a young woman gets out of her proper sphere, the rest of the world gets into motion to get her back again."

"Am I out of my proper sphere?"

"That is what I am trying to find out. Appearances indicate that you are."

"Appearances are deceitful. Tell me, please, just what is my proper sphere?"

"The proper sphere of every woman is found in the heart and home of some man," replied Hogden with some grimness.

"That is seeing it from the masculine view point, isn't it? But suppose one cannot obtain the ideal, you wouldn't have them sit down and wait, would you?"

An unusual light had come into Hogden's eyes.

"This old world groans with unrighted wrongs, but they can best be righted, by each performing his allotted duty, not by great sacrifice on the part of a few. We are held responsible according to our capabilities, the man of two talents has more to answer for than the man of five."

"You mean, said Joanna after a long pause, that I ought to go back to Mrs. Hunter?"

"Yes," said Hogden.

"I wonder why I am so at variance with the rest of the world," said Joanna struggling with her disappointment.

Did Hogden wish to get rid of her? It must be because of some personal dislike, she was faithful in the performance of her duties.

Hogden looked at her; the strange light was still in his eyes, but he would not trust himself to speak. He, too, felt hurt—she had not understood him. Her going out of his daily life, was made endurable only by the thought that she was spared much, that was to her, fatiguing toil.

He knew it was not for love of the profession, that she wore her nurse's uniform. What her troubles were, he could only guess. Restless and

unsatisfied she sought relief in occupation, and his physician's instinct told him how it would end; her glorious youth wasted, her finer spirit unable to endure the strain put upon it, must succumb, there could be no other result.

From the curling tendrils of hair, which he loved to watch, to the tips of her fingers, she was precious in his sight, and he ground his teeth as he thought of his helplessness.

"You will not have to wait long," he said as he stopped the car and sprang out, then, seemingly moved by some impulse, he turned and came close to her side, cool, masterful.

"We have, somehow, misunderstood each other, and the street isn't the happiest spot for an explanation, but at a more convenient time and place you shall tell me everything."

Joanna watched him stride up the walk to the house, her breath coming a little quicker and the color increasing in her cheeks.

"Not, please,—not even 'if I will,'—just plain 'shall.' I shall tell him everything. 'Oh,' and her indignant look changed for one of wistful appeal, 'if I only could.'"

Hogden had said his stay would be short, but Joanna thought it interminable, and for entertainment she studied the surroundings.

They were in what had once been a residential section of Old New York. It was now a "bone of contention" between the advancing slum districts on one side and the small business establishments on the other.

The house stood somewhat back from the street, in what once was magnificent grounds, but so stren-

uous had been the press of business interests, little remained now, but the walk leading up to the imposing front entrance.

The latter was on the level with the backs of the neighboring houses.

"Houses, like people have an individuality of their own," she thought, "this one has an air of being ashamed of the company it is in."

Then her heart gave an undisciplined throb as the door opened and Hogden came out followed by a strange gentlemen.

The two moved slowly down the walk, engaged in earnest conversation, pausing when they reached the street for a few last words.

The eyes of the stranger rested on Joanna with a cool, cold stare.

"Does he think I am part of the machine?" she thought.

Scraps of the conversation came to her.

"Yes, of course, if you think best, but in my opinion he would be as well off without a nurse as with one. But for the sake of public opinion, I suppose it is well to make some concessions."

Hogden replied briefly that a nurse would be sent.

Joanna came to a quick decision. While Hogden was jotting down data in his note book, she alighted from the car.

"Pardon me, but I overheard you say a nurse would be sent; I will remain and save you the trouble," she said in response to his look of inquiry.

Hogden stood squarely in her path; for a moment, Greek met Greek.

"It isn't necessary that you take care of all the

poor devils, is it? It isn't a pleasant case, Miss Lester, I think you ought not to try it. The man is old, they have called him crazy, but it is only senile debility. He is a miser, and not very dear to his relatives; it couldn't be other than a very disagreeable case."

"Never-the-less, I would like to try it. Don't try to dissuade me, please,—you won't understand, and I cannot explain," looking at him with troubled eyes, "but I would like to take the case."

"Very well," said Hogden, in his business like tone, "I'll see that you are relieved promptly. Good bye."

"You will be relieved in a day or two," he called back as the car started.

Watching it out of sight, Joanna was aware of a feeling of loneliness and she half regretted her hasty decision.

"For shame! let her meet her fate bravely," and she moved up the walk toward the house.

CHAPTER XI

David Hogden

The Reverend David Hogden sat alone in his somber study. He sat with his head bowed upon his hand, and he had been sitting in that position for a long time.

His housekeeper had looked in at the door twice, but had gone away muttering "poor man—it's a shame."

The little clock on the mantle tinkled seven. David Hogden raised his head.

"I think I will go to-night," he said slowly, aloud, "it will be a change from these sad thoughts."

But he did not at once arise. His eyes were directed to the picture on his desk—the picture of a gray haired woman with a sunny, smiling face.

"You are spared this, Milly, you would never admit I was a failure."

"I felt it was coming but this is a blow—it has broken me—quite broken me."

He arose to his feet and essayed a few faltering steps about the room.

The blow to which the reverend gentleman referred was the decision of the prudential committee of the First Church—his church, which had been made known to him that day. Not one of them had

softened the hurt of it by a kind word. The letter stated succinctly that the committee had decided that a change was deemed advisable—a younger man seemed a necessity in the First Church.

As a business letter it was flawless, as a letter to a pastor, from his people, it was as bitter as death. They had found the man they wanted for his successor, they said, hence this unpremeditated haste.

His successor chosen while he yet occupied the pulpit, it didn't matter, it would have come to this; he was old—old and useless.

Was that the sort of disciple he was? The bowed shoulders straightened a little.

"Not my will but thine, O Lord," fell tremblingly from his lips, and the Reverend David Hogden left the study to make ready for his departure on his little journey for comfort.

Many people would have smiled, some in amusement, some in pity at David Hogden's fancies.

The morrow was the anniversary of his wedding day and he wanted to return to the home where much of their married life had been spent. She believed in him, this gentle partner, of his worthy but unsuccessful life; and, just now, he was a bruised reed, and longed for help and comfort, and her memory was all he had.

Since her death he had wanted to make their summer home his permanent abode and become a commuter, but his people had not approved.

David Hogden was an old man, two years younger than his brother, H. H. Hogden, the great financier, but he looked older.

In the early years of his ministry he was called the "young man eloquent;" Why did a begin-

ning of so much promise end in mediocrity? was a question which was sometimes asked, and which puzzled his friends to answer.

If he had lost some of the virility of youth, he had gained those things which make old age distinguished wisdom, patience and knowledge of life.

The cause of David Hogden's failure lay not in his power to preach, but in his manner of practicing what he preached. His wealthy parishioners objected to having their visits to their pastor interrupted by a Barrabbas or a Magdalene from the street.

There were different ways of interpreting that passage "as ye did it unto others so ye did it unto me" and the Reverend Hogden's interpretation was far too literal.

The First Church owed its life to his fostering care; but in its prosperity, it chose to overlook its earlier history and forget its debt of gratitude.

When Herbert Hogden closed his doors to his son, the arms of his brother David were open to receive that son, and David Hogden would have given the little he possessed to advance his nephew in his chosen profession.

But Richard Hogden would not permit it. He would accept nothing from his uncle but his love and that was given unstintedly.

Many a time David Hogden had interceded with the Wall Street Magnate for the sake of the son, till at last he was advised to cease his visits.

"If that is all you have got to say, you needn't come wining here," said the financier.

"He is your nephew, all right, but he isn't my son. Neither of you ever amounted to anything and you never will."

Though his pride smarted under that taunt, it was not of himself that David Hogden thought. If the boy had no father it was his duty to fill that place. And to him it brought happiness. God had taken away his dearly loved wife but he had given him a son.

The morning in his old home did not bring the peace he hoped for. He busied himself with homely cares, swept the paths, mended a broken trellis and later visited his wife's grave in the little cemetery.

Returning, he took the longer path by the river, a walk hallowed by many memories, but he was not destined to be alone with them that day—an artist was there before him.

"You have discovered the spot I see," said David Hogden, "it is one of nature's loveliest, I am glad it is to be made immortal."

"I wish I could be sure of that," the artist's tone was genial, "it is certainly worthy."

"Yes, it is worthy, and you have done well—very well, it is all there, even to the ice palace where Mrs. Hogden used to affirm, the fairies danced on moonlight nights."

The young man grew enthusiastic in the presence of an interested listener, and David Hodgen turned from the picture to look at the artist.

Where had he seen that handsome face with the touch of effeminacy which the French barber had given it.

"I wonder if we have somewhere met? Your face has a familiar look. My name is Hogden."

"And mine is Stephens—Lynn Stephens."

"Oh, yes I remember you now. Mrs. Stephens was once of my parish."

And he thought he could guess the whole story of domestic discord, and the probable future. The young woman who joined them, at this juncture, deepened his convictions.

A great longing to protect Lynn Stephens from his greatest enemy—himself—took possession of him.

Sometimes, one's mistakes, might result in greater attainment, but Lynn Stephens' would be as a millstone hanged about his neck.

"I came from the city only last night," he said with gentle dignity "my house is closed much of the time, a kindly neighbor has charge of it. If my wife were living this day would have been the forty-sixth anniversary of our wedding. Will you share what cheer a lonely old man can give?"

With a hesitating look at his companion Stephens gratefully accepted.

Ever impressionable, the sympathetic interest of David Hogden awoke an instant response, and the Lynn Stephens Joanna had known seemed to shake himself loose from the accumulation of the superficial, and stand forth winning and buoyant.

He talked to David Hogden of the advance Richard, his nephew, had made in his profession, of the place he had won in the medical world.

And David Hogden beamed. This was an answer to his prayers there was always so much comfort in talking about Richard.

Miss Lendenning found herself bored almost to extinction. A conversation in her presence, in which she neither played the leading part nor became the chief topic, was a novel experience, and not at all pleasant.

This little excursion into the country, in the interests of art was her own idea, and she was finding like many another that the best laid plans go oft awry. Her interest in art didn't extend to landscape painting, it centered in the human form, and that her own.

But this "unknown charmer" she felt sure, was urging him to return and fulfill some by-gone resolve; and no one, she had declared, as she paced her room, should gain a stronger hold on him than she had herself.

Hence this journey into the country, and to all appearances, she had made a grievous failure.

With a mental resolve that she would avoid all clerical looking gentlemen in the future, as if they had the plague, she wandered about the room looking for some means to draw Stephens to her side.

David Hogden ordered the luncheon served in the library. It was his favorite room. The long latticed windows, divided in the center, opened inward like a door.

Miss Lendenning stepped forward to close a window, and, in doing so, her glance fell upon a cabinet photo of a lady on the desk at her right.

She remembered that Stephens had been attracted to that corner on his entrance into the room and had since cast furtive glances in that direction.

The clinging black draperies and sad unfathomable eyes of the photo presented a decided contrast to the picture in Stephens' studio, yet, there was no mistaking the likeness—they were pictures of the same person.

Miss Lendenning's jealousy, which burned hot within her, was, for the moment, overshadowed by

the liveliest curiosity, and it was with chagrin that she saw the departure of the two men.

"Only a moment's absence," pleaded Stephens, "just to get the sketch from another point of view."

David Hogden was inwardly praying "Oh, Lord direct—let me be of assistance."

Left to herself Miss Lendenning quickly crossed to the escritoire and lifted the picture from its frame.

There was no mark of identification upon it, save the name of the artist, and she noted that carefully before replacing the picture. Who was she, and how strange to find her here?

Stephens as well as herself was taken unawares; she had seen his start of ill concealed surprise, when he first entered the room.

She stepped back a pace or two, and looked at the picture critically, her own face darkening meanwhile.

"That picture seems to interest you."

Miss Lendenning couldn't have been more startled, had the picture opened its lips to speak, she whirled on her heel to face the speaker.

A young woman, somewhat older than herself, was looking at her with a smile which seemed to conceal a sneer.

Miss Lendenning drew herself up.

"Do you know who it is?" she asked in a somewhat insolent manner.

"Oh, yes," returned the other in a soft drawling voice, and the same disagreeable smile.

For a moment, Miss Lendenning forgot the stranger's amusement, forgot how plainly revealed was her curiosity.

"Who is it?" Her eagerness spoke in face and voice.

The strange young woman looked at her curiously.

"She is Joanna Lester, the singer."

There was a tinge of contempt in the voice, which caught Miss Lendenning's quick ear and for a moment, black eye and blue measured powers. Insolently inquiring the black, contemptuous and amused the blue.

Miss Lendenning knew instinctively, that Joanna Lester was as abhorrent to this young woman as to herself. A hundred questions tore at her lips for utterance but the other's expression checked them.

Miss Lovell, on her part, was asking herself if this rather under bred young woman would be likely to satisfy her curiosity concerning Joanna Lester or possibly Richard Hogden, but the cool insolence on Miss Lendenning's face silenced the inquiry.

Those who would work evil are sometimes made powerless by their lack of trust in each other.

"Miss Lester is a person of many accomplishments, she is, at present a hospital nurse," volunteered Miss Lovell, not from any desire to gratify the other's curiosity but because she liked to repeat the fact, it seemed to proclaim her superiority and though Miss Lovell never admitted it, even to her mirror—In Miss Lester's presence she cringed.

"Ah," Miss Lendenning's exclamation was expressive, she had the knowledge she desired, at last.

"Perhaps I ought to introduce myself, I am Julia Lendenning," she said.

This information was received in non-committed silence. Miss Lovell continued to look at her with the pleasant smile which might conceal a sneer.

Miss Lendenning's impulse was frozen at birth. It was possible that this very plain young woman, in spite of her rich furs, had never heard that hers was an absolutely faultless figure, and she assumed a pose calculated to bring its beauty into prominence.

"Mr. Hogden accompanied Mr. Stephens, the latter is sketching the falls of Lovers' Lane," she said with a tinge of hauteur.

Miss Lovell's smile became openly disagreeable.

"Thanks, I think I will not wait, H. H. Hogden sends his regards to his brother."

And gathering her furs about her she trailed languidly from the room.

In truth Herbert Hogden had sent no word. Coming home unexpectedly he found Miss Lovell there installed, and he sent her to his brother David simply because he knew she did not want to go. He did not like Miss Lovell.

When David Hogden received the supposed message from his brother it hurt like a blow. It seemed a gibe at his failure.

"He must be the fanatic of Forty-fifth Street, this David Hogden," remarked Miss Lendenning, on their homeward journey.

Stephens did not reply, he felt very much annoyed, Joanna's picture had disturbed him. His talk with David Hogden somehow, he couldn't have told how, had left him in a somewhat perturbed state of mind.

"Would this little journey into the country seem quite as tame as it really was? Miss Lendenning had beguiled him into it, and he was beginning to think he was the innocent and injured party.

"If things have gone wrong to-day it isn't my fault."

"Have I said anything?" asked Stephens in cool displeasure.

Smarting with wounded pride and afire with jealousy, Miss Lendenning forgot her usual caution.

"One might as well speak, sometimes, as to indicate their displeasure by their manner."

To this, Stephens made no reply.

"I tried to make the day a success, but——"

"Oh, let it drop—I'm not blaming anybody."

Stephens was irritated, and he showed it.

Perhaps Miss Lendenning was more angry than she had ever been in her life; she ordered Stephens to stop the car, she would walk.

"Don't be a fool!" said Stephens roughly, "we will have to endure each other's society until we reach home, but it won't be long."

Her burst of anger over, Miss Lendenning subsided in sulky silence, until Stephens assisted her to alight. She surprised him by clinging to his arm and tearfully apologizing.

"Oh, it's all right," he said, anxious to get away.

"It was nothing at all, not worth mentioning."

"But if you can really forgive me," plaintively, "you must stop for tea—I shall not think I am forgiven if you don't."

And, Stephens, much against his will, went in.

Left alone, David Hogden was thinking the day a most bitter one. In his mental distress and helplessness, he placed his wife's chair beside his own, hoping in the thought of their years together, years of perfect understanding and harmony, some relief might be obtained from the wounds which still rankled.

A quick firm step was heard, crunching the frozen earth outside.

David Hogden arose to his feet, he thought he knew that step—would know it among a thousand.

A moment later, Richard Hogden entered the room.

"Richard, boy, but I am glad you've come! Come to the fire. I was wanting something pretty badly. I think now it was you."

Hogden laughed. There was something peculiar about his laugh, only those nearest him had ever noticed it. Just now, it had a gentle, soothing note like the voice of a mother when she croons a song to a sick child.

"The worst has come, Richard," said David Hogden with a little catch in his voice, "I have been discharged."

"Oh, not quite that, uncle David, some of your parishioners have taken exception to your summary dismissal, they have held a mass meeting and sent me after you."

"Richard!" said his uncle, falteringly, "are you sure you haven't made a mistake?"

"No, I never—they are too costly. It was a case of minority rules and the majority put up a kick. A delegation came to me this morning, failing to find you, but the day has been so full of work, I couldn't get away until now."

David Hogden sat down; the reaction had come and he was trembling slightly with eagerness and relief. The measure had been pressed down, running over.

"To think they really wanted me," he repeated, as Hogden related what had been done.

"Let us go, Richard, I am ready now.

"You are always safe if you trust in the Lord, Richard, always safe."

Just before they started Hogden stepped to the book case and removed Joanna's picture.

"I want this, Uncle David?"

"Yes, you put it there—it is yours. Is she ever coming back to us?"

"Coming back? You skipped the society column in your paper, didn't you? She has been with Mrs. Hunter for the fortnight past."

"Indeed! That is good news. There is only one thing more." Looking wishfully at his nephew.

"I am afraid, uncle David," said Hogden, gravely,

"That is one of the things you don't get."

"Perhaps, my boy, but I keep hoping; this day has ended with many blessings."

Hogden slipped Joanna's picture into his breast pocket and he seemed to feel her presence throughout that ride.

CHAPTER XII

The Miser

When Joanna rang the bell of number 204, she was thinking that her courage for this new mission, diminished with the familiar chug chug of Hogden's automobile..

She rang twice and waited long each time.

"The missus is out, mum," said a girl with the reddest of red hair, who finally appeared.

"But it is the sick man I want to see."

"The sick man! and perhaps it's the ould man up stairs, ye mane, but he never sees."

"He will see me, I am the nurse."

"The nurse is it? and whatever sint a lady loike yus to that ould spalpeen? Oh wurra, wurra!"

Was Hogden right, was she out of her proper sphere? Here was another who seemed to think so. What a horribly twisted Chinese puzzle life was to be sure.

"Do ye want to go up, Mum?"

"Yes, please, but will you tell me your name first?"

"Me name? Oh, me name is Nora McKane. Ye jist go up thim stairs and t'end av the hall, ye'll see two doors, and whichever wan ye open it will be the ither wan ye want."

Joanna followed the directions given and found as

she had been told, when she opened the door at the end of the hall, that it was the other one she wanted. Opening the other, she found herself in a little ante room facing two more doors. The one on the left was reached by a single stair, the door on the right, admitted her to the patient's room.

It was so dark, she could with difficulty, distinguish objects in the room.

Raising one of the heavy curtains, she met with a volumn of shrill reproaches from the bed.

"Who are you? Who are you? Why do you come here? I don't want anything—go away—go away—Paul died in prison, so can I—go away—go away. I want nothing—nothing, I can take care of myself, they are so wasteful—wasteful."

Joanna approached the bed; a little old man, frightfully dirty, peered up at her out of his red rimmed eyes, half in fear, half in cunning.

"A woman—I don't like women—they spend—spend. I don't want—you—go away."

A moment's survey, showed her that her patient was confined to two rooms, the one in which he lay, and a small study opening out of the ante room. Dust lay thick upon the books—everything.

"Oh," groaned Joanna, "she would have her own way, and now she must make good."

She returned to the patient's room.

The little old man was sitting up in bed. So emaciated was he, he looked scarcely larger than a boy of twelve. He was pointing toward the withdrawn curtain in a frenzy of fear.

"The light! The light!" he cried.

Joanna sat down beside the bed and tried to understand his ravings.

"They'll come, they'll come!" he moaned, "when it is light."

"Who will come?"

"They," and he darted a look of fear in the direction of the doorway.

"You needn't be afraid, they won't come while I am here."

He looked at her doubtfully.

"Who are you?"

"I am the nurse."

"The nurse?" still doubtfully, "they cost money. Who sent you?"

"Doctor Hogden."

The name meant nothing to him, he still looked distrustful.

"You needn't feel afraid, I will not harm you. Would you like your supper now?"

An avid look had come into his eyes.

"Yes, I should like something to eat, but where are you going to get it?"

"Oh, I can get it, never fear, I can make delicious oyster stew."

The little man licked his lips, his hands trembled, "make it," he whispered.

Joanna's repulsion was gone, she felt only an infinite pity, as she helped him back on the pillows.

He ate greedily, when she returned with a steaming bowl of soup.

"Shall I eat it all?"

Joanna nodded.

"But to-morrow," he asked eyeing her doubtfully.

"There will be more."

"More—more—where will you get it?"

"Where I got this."

The answer seemed to satisfy, for he ate the remainder with evident relish.

Arising to return the bowl, Joanna was checked by his feeble grasp on her skirt.

"You won't go away?" he begged.

"No, I won't go away, if you obey orders."

But his cries and lamentations, in the cleaning up process, shook her fortitude and she was half inclined to leave him as she had found him, since cleanliness seemed a thing so objectionable why bother one's self about it?

But it was over at last and more weary than she had been for many a day, Joanna sought her hastily improvised couch in the study.

She was awakened some hours later by a peculiar, shrill scream.

Joanna was on her feet in an instant.

"Be quiet, you old fool, I am not going to hurt you," said the harsh voice of a woman. On the threshold the intruder encountered Joanna in her nurse's garb of white, and shrank back with a stifled exclamation.

Joanna hastily touched the electric button, and the two looked at each other in the revealing light.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?" asked the woman, insolently, perceiving she was confronted by a human being and not a ghost.

"I am the nurse."

"The nurse, what nurse?"

"Who sent you? That old fool in there doesn't need one any more than I need one,"

"I came by Doctor Hogden's directions, that is all I can tell you."

The young woman stepped back from the door,

still keeping an eye on Joanna, and called to someone below.

"Come here, Jim."

Joanna noticed that she was in evening dress, a crimson silk, and wore an abundance of pearls.

Someone came slowly and heavily up the stairs, and held a whispered conversation with the young woman and then both advanced to meet Joanna.

"Jim" was a heavy browed, heavy featured man, resembling the "ward boss" in the newspaper cartoons. Evidently, he was on the point of retiring, for he was in his shirt sleeves and minus collar; a large diamond solitaire, sparkled on his shirt front.

Joanna briefly explained the reason of her presence; the husband and wife exchanged glances and the latter laughed tauntingly.

"It's uncle Ed again."

"Looks like it," muttered her husband.

"See here," and the woman turned to Joanna speaking in a sharp business-like tone. "It's his uncle Ed that has done this thing and he is the one that must pay the bills. He,—" with a contemptuous nod toward the patient's room, "is old and foolish and too stingy to live. A hundred nurses can't make him any better, and the sooner it's over the better for all concerned. There is no use wasting money on him.

"Come, Jim, I'm going to bed."

Joanna quieted the whimpering old man and when he at last sank into a drowse, she returned to her couch in the study, but she did not at once fall asleep. This new turn of affairs disturbed her not a little. Should she abandon her charge when Hogden's promised relief came on the morrow?

Distasteful as it all was pity for the repulsive old man, tugged at her heart.

The morrow came and passed! Likewise the next day and the next bringing no relief or word from Hogden, and it was becoming increasingly evident she was considered an intruder to be dislodged and driven forth.

The silent but active operations of the enemies' forces, were more nerve racking than any open attack.

Things had a way of disappearing that was very puzzling. There was something uncanny about it. Any article of food, especially nourishing and appetizing dishes prepared for her patient, disappeared as if they had suddenly been endowed with legs.

At times she fancied she heard stealthy foot steps, and once, thinking to satisfy herself that it was neither a ghost nor her imagination, she caught a glimpse of a vanishing figure.

In spite of herself, Joanna felt she was getting nervous. She questioned Norah, but the girl was ignorant of what was going on around her. She helped Joanna, however, by taking the food under her own charge.

"And shure the old one himself, if he comes, will find Norah McKane's ready," said the faithful creature.

So unstrung had Joanna become, an exclamation of alarm arose to her lips, when returning from the kitchen, one day, she found a strange gentleman sitting by the bedside. He arose at her entrance, a tall somewhat stoop shouldered old man in clerical dress.

"You!" he said, "and here!"

"Do you know me?" faltered Joanna thinking, for a moment, she was confronted by a mild case of lunacy.

"Yes, I know you, Miss Lester, I have heard you sing many times. And I have wanted to tell you how great the consolation you have given an old man.

"No, you could not understand," he continued, in answer to Joanna's impulsive assertion, "how could you? Old age and youth are far apart. We haven't your elasticity to arise from repeated shatterings of our ideals, but are left to gain comfort by looking backwards upon the life we have lived, if, happily, we have tried to make it worthy.

"But how is it I find you here? I was told you had returned to your place in the musical world."

"It was a mistake—I am a professional nurse."

The stranger looked at her a few moments in silence.

"And you left such a career for this?"

"Oh, but you don't understand, 'this' is not so bad."

The stranger had arisen and stood buttoning his coat. He advanced a step, looking down upon her.

"There is much in this world that I do not understand, but I recognize heroism when I see it. You have helped me to see my duty; you will not understand that, of course, and it does not matter. You held the lamp and have shown me my pathway, and I thank you.

"Pardon an old man's remissness, my name is Hogden—you know Richard, my nephew, I think."

"Doctor Hogden? Oh, yes!" and Joanna's face lightened, she extended her hand.

"He speaks of you sometimes, and it always gives me pleasure to know his friends as he knows them."

"Good-bye, my dear young lady, you have a career before you, and one thing, not the least, is the proving that one of God's best gifts to this suffering old world is a noble woman."

"You give me more credit than I deserve—I have but a humble part to play."

"It isn't the part we play, but the kind of players we are, which reveals our place in the Master's Kingdom. It could not, in justice, be otherwise."

"Good-bye, again, and I am very glad of this opportunity, Miss Lester, to tell you that it has been a great pleasure to me to hear you sing."

Joanna found her patient sitting up in bed.

"What did he say to you out there in the hall?" he asked suspiciously.

"He spoke to me of his nephew, Doctor Hogden."

"And nothing about wastefulness? They all want to spend—spend. I used to know him once, and he spent his money, spent it—spent it! He is old and poor now, and it's gone."

"Was he trying to get you to go away with him?"

"No, I shall not go away."

"You'll stay, you'll stay!" said the miser in a wheedling tone.

"You're like me, you don't waste, you don't spend, and you'll stay. What if he comes again?" he asked anxiously.

"I will stay."

Joanna's reply seemed to satisfy him for he sank back on the pillow feebly muttering.

She could not desert her post now even if the promised relief came for she had given her word.

But what did Hogden's silence mean? It was not like him to forget, something must have happened. And Joanna smiled as she thought how improbable it seemed, that anything could happen to Richard Hogden, that would alter the course, upon which he had decided. Invincible, he seemed and then a twinge of pain. How few there were, so few, but were they to blame, if nature drew them towards the valleys rather than the mountain tops? Nature had not destined them to be supports but to be supported.

But such moralizing hurt her and for relief she turned her thoughts to Hogden once more.

Her surmise that something had happened proved correct, a letter postmarked Baltimore arrived that evening. It was from Hogden.

"Someone has said that the past is never forgotten but is continually being repeated in new dress.

"Since I saw you, Don Quixote has haunted my waking hours, my dreams as well, sometimes he takes the form of a prima donna masquerading as a nurse; sometimes, though not so often, he seems to be a doctor of my acquaintance, who aspired to found a charity hospital.

"The climax was reached yesterday when a little boot black, run over in the streets and badly crushed, gravely informed me. 'I needn't give him any ayther,' 'twas an hexpensive job enough without it, and he needed the money for his sister.'

"My dear Miss Lester, that is the end of the sermon, my theology is rusty and squeaks frightfully at the hinges but I know there are saints and rejoice that through them there is hope of redemption of the devils.

"I regret that I was unexpectedly called away but left orders for your relief and supposed 'ere this reaches you, you will be released from your self-imposed task.

"Write me frankly please, at any time, and anything you wish.

R. Hogden."

What an ability some people had of acting as props to other people. Joanna smiled wishfully as she folded the letter and slipped it back into its envelope. It was hastily written, Hogden's correspondence was made to fill in unoccupied moments between consultations.

Jonanna absently contemplated the address, the shading of the capital letters. Had she any right to accept this offered aid?

She struggled to answer truthfully but she knew her feminine soul longed for the comfort of resting on this man's strength.

People had always seemed to think her the embodiment of self reliance, she wondered at the insight that could discover how much she longed to lean on another. Yet how delicately his assistance was offered.

It came to her all at once, that it was partly because she cared for Hogden's opinion, that she remained at her post. He had tried to discourage her it was true; in his letter had called her Don Quixote, yet she knew, in her place, he would not turn a deserter.

Joanna left the letter under a pile of papers, smiling as she did so at her device of putting it and its writer out of her mind.

"A lady to see you, Miss," announced Norah the following afternoon the eighth day of her service.

"A lady, did you know her?"

"Deed I didn't, Miss. She looks a bit lofty loike, and savin' yersilf, Miss, she's a foine looking lady."

Joanna descended the stairs wondering idly whom her visitor might be.

Miss Lendenning was standing in the center of the room and looking about her with disdain. The brilliant bronze, red and green of the carpet, the pink and cream of the walls, the red and gold of the upholstery presented a dazzling array of color. In her red coat, she seemed the *raison d'être* of this incongruous assemblage of color. She turned as Joanna entered the room.

Like many another, in the presence of her superiors she was servile, in the presence of her fancied inferiors she became insolent.

The first glance revealed to Joanna the identity of her visitor, she advanced quietly to meet her without change of countenance.

Miss Lennings face was a study. Surprise, curiosity, envious admiration, struggled for mastery.

"You are Miss Lester?"

Joanna nodded, her steady regard was a little disconcerting. What she had expected, Miss Lendenning hardly knew, but it was not this. She studied Joanna's face for a moment and came to the instant conclusion that she would make an appeal.

"I have something to say to you, Miss Lester," she began in a suave tone.

Joanna gravely inclined her head and waited. True to her nature, Miss Lendenning felt an increas-

ing impulse to cringe. Then she looked into the face before her and jealousy leaped up within her mad, burning. She spoke stiffly:

"I fear I am a bearer of disagreeable tidings. You were at one time, a friend of Lynn Stephens, the artist, I believe."

"I know no reason why I am not a friend, now."

"But I do, and I am going to prove to you that he never was your friend."

Again Joanna silently waited. Her manner was too calm, too self possessed, it increased the other's anger.

This was not the girlish vision of the violet eyes, in Stephens' studio, whom she confidently expected to dissolve in tears. The violet eyes were looking at her now, with steady cold regard, there was no hint of tears in this young woman's quiet composure.

Miss Lendenning's manner lost its suavity, her tongue was tipped with malice. She was fighting for what she pleased to consider, was dearer to her than life, namely, the love and admiration of a man. But as she regarded the several men of her intimate acquaintance with the same feeling the declaration seemed to lose its effect.

"I understand, at one time, he asked you to marry him," she began.

Joanna winced.

"Then he married abroad. His wife abused him shamefully, but that has nothing to do with me. I was always his friend and he gave me his confidence. He asked me to marry him, he can't deny it, and I don't care who knows it. His wife had not made separation public, but it was coming. Then he went

to the hospital and met you I don't know how much encouragement he gave you or how much you took for granted. Lynn is very—susceptible, but I think he meant to do right by me.”

“Why did you come to me?”

It was a very natural question but it took Miss Lendenning unawares and her face darkened. She knew her reason for coming was to excite suspicion and disgust in Joanna's mind, for this she had lied shamelessly.

“I am a woman, and I will not meekly endure, when my happiness is snatched from my grasp.”

“But that does not answer my question—what do you expect me to do?”

“Give him up,” was on Miss Lendenning's tongue but it didn't suit her to plead.

I thought if you knew—he deserted you before, he will again. I have only to say the word. He made an engagement with you and broke it to make one with me. He will break others, he belongs to me, if you do not believe it, I can tell you more.”

“I do not care to listen to you.”

“And you will give him up?”

“I did not say that—why do you persecute him so?”

“Persecute him!” really! this was the most incomprehensible person.

“Yes, why do you not leave him free to make his own choice?”

Miss Lendenning's lips began to show the suspicions of a snarl.

“Answer your own question,” she retorted, rather ungrammatically,

“Do you love him?”

"Are you going to the moon?" would have been equally comprehensible. Love to Miss Lendenning meant material things. The gift of a diamond necklace would have revealed it, but unfortunately, a cheaper jewel would just as plainly, have indicated a diminution of that commodity.

One thing was plain, Joanna would not relinquish her hold and Miss Lendenning's snarl deepened.

"Think a moment," said Joanna. What moved her to speak words, which she felt would fall unheeded, she hardly knew.

Weak and erring as she knew Stephens to be; she couldn't see him sacrificed like this; see him throw aside the opportunity which had come to him, to redeem some of his failures, and win a name for himself in the world of art. As disagreeable as the duty seemed to her, she nerved herself for its performance, for Stephens' sake.

"You do not love this man therefore you cannot raise him to any higher level. He has genius, and rightly directed may do much for art. Of what possible value is his love to you, if you value it not for love's sake? Leave him to his art; surely you can devote your beauty to nobler ends. I entreat you leave him to art."

Miss Lendenning moved toward the door speechless with rage. Joanna's words had poured forth so fast she had not had power to stop them. But malice must have an outlet, and at the door she turned.

"Your fine words may do for some people, but I'm not such a fool. I can twist Lynn Stephens around my finger and I intend to do it. He deserted you once and he will again. I promise you that."

But Joanna was half way up the stairs.

Beaten and bruised as her love had been, naked, held up to the gibe of the scornful it was still just, and she acquitted Stephens of much that Miss Lendenning wished her to believe.

"Oh," groaned Joanna, "What things are done in Thy name."

CHAPTER XIII

An Appeal

Perhaps I am taking an unwarranted liberty; I have tried to put thought of this letter out of my mind; tried to take up life again and put something into it. God knows I have made little enough of it in the past.

You remember I always took my troubles to you, and I am coming to you now. That I can expect to receive small favor in your eyes, is only my just reward.

I vowed, when I lay at Death's door, if my life was spared, the rest of it should be devoted to atonement. I wronged you most, and it is to you I would make my first appeal.

God knows I would lie in the dust at your feet, but that cannot undo the past.

Forgive me, my presumption, and, for charity's sake, let me tell the whole shameful story.

You knew something of my early life, but my father you did not know. Far be it from me, to lay the blame of my wrong doing on those who came before, but there are certain tendencies which have clung to me all my life and God knows how hard I have struggled against them.

My father was an artist, but he never arose to prominence because he, like myself, had little love

for the strenuous life. It embittered and enflamed my mother, and I cannot remember when I was not taught to seize every advantage—every opportunity. You know she was an ardent supporter when you insisted that I possessed genius, and she counseled me to remain abroad as long as possible.

None of this excuses me, but you see how easy it was.

I never loved Miss Pettingill, I cannot think she ever loved me. I was anxious to remain in Paris and I, through the kindness of artist friends, had made entree into society, in a small way. Miss Pettingill was eager for social distinction and it was that which brought us together.

It was a travesty on marriage and—God forgive me—I at one time thought there was no other kind. I would give my right hand if I could go back to that first year in Paris and live it over again. You cannot understand the bitterness and regret, though you possess a mind and soul which comprehends much of the lives of those so far removed from your own purity.

Our marriage was a very unhappy one, but it could not result otherwise. I lost my love for art, my hopes and ambitions. I was moving toward the devil as fast as I could—knew it, and did not care.

And then I heard you sing, Joanna, I was ashamed to speak, ashamed that your eyes should rest on such a failure as I; I slunk out of sight and I saw you not again until I went to the hospital and I count that one of the greatest blessings that ever fell to my lot.

You know the rest—you have stooped once more to pull a worthless wretch to his feet again, and he is more mud stained, less able to stand alone.

He cannot ask you what he asked you once, because that right is his no longer unless you give him leave to speak but I implore you to look on him as kindly as you can. It is your hand that has dragged him out of the mire. He may not be worth the saving, but of such worth as he is you have made him.

Can you imagine how such a wretch would feel, when he would pour out his heart and cannot? His own evil deeds have tied his tongue and he is condemned to silence, while others may take that for which his soul longs.

I should ask for justice, only yet what wretch is content with that? They all cry loudly for mercy.

Forgive this, Joanna, if you think it ought not to have been written, and grant me what mercy you can.

L. Stephens.

Stephens read the letter through with haggard face and slipped it into the envelope.

He had heard nothing from Joanna since the line written to inform him that she had called at his studio to see the picture.

Why had she not written since? he asked himself this question daily. Could she have learned the reason of this failure to keep his appointment? He had meant to keep it, of course he had. Julia Lendenning had met him with a party of friends, he pleaded an engagement and she promised to release him at that particular hour.

Their last meeting had ended with ill feeling on both sides, he was glad to see she had regretted their little quarrel and anxious to meet her in her own

spirit, he had gone with her to the restaurant. It was not for motives of concealment that he ignored the incident in his letter to Joanna—it seemed very trivial, and he couldn't put it on paper with out giving it more color than it really deserved.

He didn't love Julia Lendenning, not he, but she had been kind to him, when friends were few, and he couldn't turn on her the cold shoulder. Women didn't understand things of that sort. Julia Lendenning was only a friend, never could be more. Donning coat and hat he went out to mail his letter and "get a wiff of air."

Strolling leisurely up newspaper row he met Julia Lendenning. He saw her coming with her swift gliding step. The snow had begun to fall in great flakes, coming lazily down. She wore her favorite color, dark red; as she advanced, cheeks flushed by the exercise, all life and color seemed to center in her advancing figure.

The artist's instinct awoke and Stephens forgot that their last meeting ended in coolness on both sides.

"Sir Snail," she called out to him.

"Oh, I don't mind being called that! I should have missed a picture if I had hurried."

"What picture?"

"The lady in the red cloak."

"Oh!" said Miss Lendenning, dimpling, "do you like my coat?"

"I don't know anything about women's dress, it makes a beautiful blotch of color."

"A blotch of color! And that was all you saw! Why this is my newest and most fetching gown. A blotch of color—well really."

Stephens was smiling.

"You don't expect me to understand all about a fetching gown, do you? With your permission I shall transfer the foresaid gown to canvas."

Miss Lendenning gave a little shriek of delight.

"Won't that be fine, my new suit in a picture. What a distinction.

"Do you want me to pose for it now?" she asked, as she turned and walked on with him.

"Oh, I couldn't think of taking your time for that, it's only for magazine illustrations."

"But it is my new suit, the very latest thing out; I know you would not get it right," and Miss Lendenning, very prettily, simulated a wail of distress.

"No, I probably should not, but I'll get the general idea."

"General idea! that's like a man. I insist on having my gown correctly reproduced or not at all."

"But your time, haven't you an appointment at this hour?"

"What if I have, I prefer to give it to you," said Miss Lendenning, with a saucy lift of her head.

"But I couldn't let you do that."

"Well, I haven't an appointment, stupid, I was out in my best clothes looking for one and now I have found it you needn't think I shall give it up."

Stephens accepted her decision with some secret pleasure though he felt very sure the hour's sitting belonged to another. That she was ready to give it to him was at once the most delicate and potent flattery.

"I won't keep you long and that gown certainly deserves distinction."

"Oh, I am so glad you like it."

There was something in the girlish exclamation that rang false; Stephens frowned.

Quick to see her mistake Miss Lendenning fell instinctively into the position he desired; preserving a discreet silence, while Stephens hurriedly throwing aside coat and hat, collected sketching materials and set to work.

"A little more this way, there that will do. We will be through with this in no time."

And for some minutes Stephens' hasty exclamations at some inadvertence, was all that broke the silence.

"I have seen your Miss Lester."

"Indeed! Where?" asked Stephens startled into betraying his surprise.

"I chanced to call where she was nursing," was the careless reply; she had found out what she wanted to know, Joanna had not told.

"She makes a very pretty nurse."

"She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen" replied Stephens gravely.

"Handsomer than I?" asked Miss Lendenning with a rougish look.

"Yes—no—I don't know. Hers is a matchless beauty."

"He doesn't know which is the prettiest. Perhaps you meant that for a compliment, but I don't like it."

But Stephens continued in his grave mood, he worked steadily and swiftly, and Miss Lendenning's most brilliant little mots elicited only monosyllables in reply.

"If I am to be turned out," she said, "you might at least bid me an affectionate farewell."

Stephens looked up inquiringly—he had not caught her meaning.

"Turned out! In what way?"

"If my rival Miss Lester, is to crowd me out, I, at least, deserve a kind word in parting."

"No one is to crowd you out. You have been a very kind friend."

"Friend!" thought Miss Lendenning savagely.

"Miss Lester is a very old friend, I trust some day you will know her better," said Stephens, somewhat stiffly.

"And she shall know me better," was Miss Lendenning's mental comment. Aloud; "I don't believe I shall like her, she has taken away what belonged to me. I don't like to share you Lynn Stephens, with any one." And Miss Lendenning looking flushed and near the verge of tears pouted most adorably.

In spite of himself, Stephens felt moved.

"You needn't take it that way, all hasten to serve you, one admirer the less could not make much difference."

This speech elicited no response, but she turned away as if trying to control her feelings.

After a moment, Stephens lay down his brush and went to her side.

"You must not take it so seriously, it will make no difference in our friendship."

"How shall I know?" she asked with face still averted.

"But if you were in my place and somebody——"

"Oh, come, now, let's drop that," placing his hands on her shoulders and making her face him.

"I intend to marry Miss Lester, she has much more to forgive than you fancy you have. We have always been good friends, let us continue to be."

Still she stood passive in his grasp, but with down-cast face.

"Well, out with it—what's your grouch?" asked Stephens at last.

"You haven't given me any proof that you mean what you say," lifting her head.

"What proof do you want?"

Stephens was slightly taken aback.

"You might—you might kiss me good-by."

It is quite possible Stephens would rather not have complied with the request but she was standing directly in front of him, eyes looking daringly into his, and after all what could be the harm?

Outside, Miss Lendenning's face expressed all the elation she felt, then it darkened ominously. "You fool, but we shall see." But she could not have meant the dignified guardian of public peace who passed just at that moment.

CHAPTER XIV

Joanna Hides The Miser's Money

"But even a miser has human needs."

"Let him gratify his own then," was the tart reply.

"I tell you Miss—Miss——"

"Lester."

"Miss Lester, what you do, you do on your own responsibility. He is of no use to himself or anybody else. Why does he want to live?"

Joanna attempted no justification of the desire for life on the part of her patient. Why should she?—How could gross materialism understand?

"I die that ye may have life and have it more abundantly." Would be interpreted "I endow thee with all my earthly goods."

And to this the miser objected.

"It is impossible for me to help you, Miss Lester, really, it is no affair of ours. Our share of the property is this house, and we must take care of him in the bargain—a beggarly share, *I* think. A few thousand dollars would be the making of Jim's business, it's a shame that he is kept out of it, if he had it just now, it would make such a difference. He has had the promise of it too, it is rank injustice to keep him waiting. His uncle is every bit as bad as *his*

father—so miserly. As to his screaming, he always does that, fancies some one is after his gold.

"I can't listen longer to your complaints, Miss Lester, for I have an engagement. There is nothing I can do he is old and foolish and crazy. I know nothing about the loss of food of which you complain, there might be a dozen ways for it to go. I have never found servants trustworthy, but it is no concern of mine. If you find your position so difficult, I wonder that you retain it? It has always seemed strange to me that you didn't give it up at the start. There is really nothing I can do."

Joanna wearily ascended the stairs. Her patient's delight at the sight of her was pathetic. He might have deserved some of his granddaughter's opprobrium but he was old, senile and, seemingly, without a friend.

Hogden had laughed while he comforted. "Have you an eye to the miser's money?" he wrote, "Have a care, his relatives are like hungry sharks." She did not so much mind his laughter, but "coming soon" was so indefinite and the days dragged.

Stephens' letter, following close upon Miss Lendenning's visit, moved her deeply. The false pride, over weening ambition, his foreign veneer had dropped away from him he was once more the Lynn Stephens she had known. She understood, now, looking back on those earlier years, why he had taken the course which he now regretted. He had not meant to choose the wrong way, but when the moment of temptation came, he could not withstand it.

She wondered if he realized what that little weakness might cost him? He seemed to realize it, and

yet why had he been so silent concerning Miss Lendenning? What that young lady herself had said, troubled Joanna not greatly; it was Stephens' sedulous silence on the subject. Did he think "unavoidable detained" was the best excuse he could have given? Would he have said it had he been aware that she knew the reason of his failure to keep his appointment?

Still, she must not be hasty in her judgments he might be able to explain.

Joanna knew the reply she would make to his letter. She had swept her heart clean of every desire but to help him to fame and happiness. The girlish dream of long ago had faded like the roses, and she knew, now, that she was content to have it so. If only Stephens could be brought to see it in the same light, if he would pledge himself anew to art and regain what he had lost, happiness might still await them both.

Her reply to Stephens' letter was brief but kind: "Dear friend: Need I repeat that the past has been forgiven and forgotten? I wish to help you, and your success would give me more pleasure than anything else I know.

My duties claim my whole attention, for the present, and I cannot give your letter the thought that it requires, but I will not forget."

J. L.

Stephens wrote immediately in reply; "I would be an ingrate, indeed not to await your pleasure even forever. But that would not be like you Joanna, and I know you will answer me soon, meanwhile I will wait with all the patience I can command."

Lynn Stephens.

This last letter changed not the outlook, but it confirmed Joanna's resolve to save him, save him from himself, for art's sake, and his own as well.

Meanwhile, her position became daily more onerous. She felt that they must suspect her of hiding the miser's money, might not baffled avarice seek revenge?

The occurrence had happened in this manner; she was sitting by the bedside one day, the miser, who had fallen into a drowse, had been unusually timid, and unwilling to have her leave the room. A slight creaking as from a door attracted her attention, she looked up. The heavy curtain had always been a puzzle to Joanna, she thought at first it concealed a door, but she found none on looking behind it; she concluded it was placed there to gratify some whim of the little old miser.

Joanna was not nervous, but she watched it with a thrill of fear as once, twice, it was thrust out from the wall as if a hand were behind it. Some moments passed after the curtain had resumed its former position before Joanna arose and looked behind it. All was as before. The wainscoting dark with age and none too clean, extended upward to the ceiling. It looked as solid as a wall could be. But, on closer scrutiny she discovered on one of the wide panels a small spot which looked worn as if it had been well thumbed, like the exciting page of a story book.

Mechanically she placed her own thumb on the spot and the panel swung abruptly inward, and Joanna stifling an exclamation, pushed the curtain farther aside and looked. It was only a deep cupboard containing shelves, but at the back, was a black yawning chasm where boards had been removed.

Drawing the panel into place Joanna dropped the curtain. She was trembling slightly, the mystery had been discovered, but the reality was no more assuring, try as she would she could not divert that curtain from a certain uncanniness. She wondered if the bare wall would seem so dreadful, but she hesitated to remove it for fear of arousing the miser's suspicions.

A few days later while she was absent on one of her brief excursions to the kitchen, she heard an unusual commotion above, the miser's shrill treble and then a fall. Terrified, Joanna sprang up the stairs.

The curtain was thrust aside, the panel open. Prone on the floor, fallen face downward lay the miser, moaning and wailing. When she tried to raise him he clung with all his feeble strength to the lacquered box he had taken from the cupboard. It was not without difficulty, that Joanna succeeded in getting both safely on the bed.

"There's one gone! There's one gone!" wailed the old man. "You would not take it, would you, take it away from an old man?"

"I have taken nothing, what is it you have lost?"

"I believe you—you didn't take it, they took it," with a frightened look around the room, like a hunted animal when he sees the hunters close in around him. He stretched his hands over the treasures in his lap and looked up at Joanna.

"There's one gone," he quavered, "and I don't know where to put it to keep it safe."

His eyes reminded her of those of a gutter cat, she had once tried to catch and put out of it's misery. Mouthing and mumbling over his treasures, repulsive

he might be, but he was a pitiful object, too. Could she do less than aid him? How could she?

"Let us hide it," she said.

"Hide it? Yes, yes, quick!" and a gleam of intelligent cunning came into his eyes.

"Where will you hide it?—Where?"

Joanna looked about the room, there was but little furniture and it was old and shabby, a large old fashioned arm chair caught her eye.

"In this chair cushion," she said.

The miser emitted a cackle of delight. "Yes, yes, the chair," and he watched her perform the task with absorbing interest.

It cost her several hours hard work before the last money bag was safely hidden.

Later, she thought about it with some anxiety. The disappearance of the money from the cupboard would doubtless be discovered and—what then. It was the uncertainty which tried her nerves and led her to seek an interview with the miser's family, with what result we have already seen.

The curtain seemed to take on a sort of malignancy, in sheer desperation she turned her back on it; but she couldn't remain so long; as disagreeable as was the sight of it, she preferred to keep it in view.

Seven o'clock came and went, she was forced to leave the room for food and water for her patient, but she got only part way down the stairs when the miser's frantic cries, a little shriller than before, called her back. As she advanced she thought she heard light foot falls retreating.

"Don't go, don't go," whimpered the miser, clutching at her dress, "it always comes when you go."

Joanna sat down by the bed side, it began to look as if they were in a state of siege. Her patient lay very still, his fright seemed to have exhausted him, and he soon sank into slumber. Leaning her head on her hands, Joanna too, must have slept. She started up suddenly at the closing of a distant door, following, came sounds of steps in the hall. They rapidly approached, but these were not stealthy steps, they were quick and firm. Hardly knowing what to expect, she stood waiting. The door opened and Hogden entered the room.

"Oh," said Joanna and covered her face with her hands. "Miss Lester what does this mean?" forcibly removing her hands.

"I am very glad you have come," looking up with a quivering smile.

"Thanks," said Hogden, gravely, "but could you say it without crying?"

A smile of saucy amusement flashed over her face at this speech. "I'll try," she said, but grew grave immediately. "I hoped you would come because," she glanced at the bed.

Hogden came closer, looking down into her face; "You wanted me?"

"Yes, I wanted you," said Joanna falteringly, not daring to meet his gaze.

Hogden went to the bed side; "Tell me about it?"

Briefly she related all that had occurred since entering the house, save Miss Lendenning's visit. When she reached the hiding of the miser's money bags Hogden interrupted with a smothered laugh;

"And after coddling the old rascal, and paying his bills, you ended by hiding his money bags. Talk about saints!"

"What could one do? I pitied him."

"Yes, I expect you did."

"What ought I to have done?—What would you have done?"

Hogden smiled, "Not so well, by half, you have given the old fellow the happiest three weeks he has had for many a month, his last on earth."

"You don't mean——"

"No, he yet lives, but he will never waken from that comatose state, yet he may live for twenty-four hours. I do not think it probable however. It was the fright that hastened the end."

"Oh, I should not have left him."

"My dear young lady, it is not in human power to foresee all events, and decide correctly on all occasions. This was inevitable, and you may have saved him from much suffering. It is just as truthful to give it that interpretation as the other. You are at liberty now, he is beyond need of your care."

"I will stay while he lives."

"You will do no such thing—you are to go with me to-night."

"But I am not afraid, now."

"I am, a young woman who could hide the miser's money is not safe. There might be complications, don't you see?"

"I am afraid I don't see, if you think——"

"Miss Lester," Hogden's voice was stern.

"Forgive me, I am not as bad as I appear."

"As bad as you appear? Do you know just how bad that is, Miss Lester?"

Hogden's tone was so grave, Joanna looked at him half in laughter, half in shy wonder.

"So bad," continued Hogden without looking at her, "if I had been in your patient's place I should have thought heaven had indeed come upon earth."

For a moment, nothing was heard in the room but the ticking of the clock and the patient's feeble breathing. Then Hogden began to turn slowly toward her, Joanna was trembling, she was wondering if she could meet his glance when it came.

The miser choked, both turned toward the bed, Hogden placed his finger on the pulse.

"It is coming pretty soon."

"May I stay?"

"Yes, we will stay, it won't be long."

"You may as well make what preparations you have to, Miss Lester, I will remain here."

When she returned to the patient's bed side, Hogden was giving the newly arrived assistant direction, while buttoning his coat.

"It is all over, he said, in answer to Joanna's inquiring glance, "he never rallied, are you ready? I think the car is waiting."

Joanna gave a backward glance as they moved off; "I sometimes think that life is the cheapest thing in the world."

"Poor little pessimist!"

"Isn't it?"

"You ask me that?"

"Oh, no, I forgot that your business is to save life, but you must admit that we place many things before human life."

"Won't you modify your statement a little. Selfishness and greed are in the world and they cheapen life, but they are not all there is."

"I suppose you are right. You—you always are

right and what makes my speech seem more unpardonable my life was once saved by a stranger, at the risk of his own."

Hogden made an involuntary movement.

"It was nearly two years ago," continued Joanna as he did not speak. "I promised to make my life of some value to my fellow beings, in payment of the debt." She thought it rather singular that Hogden offered no comment, and she ventured one last remark. "I have wondered, sometimes what adequate return one could give?"

Hogden drew a long breath; "Take my word for it, your promise is all sufficient."

"But how would he know I had kept it?"

"I'll tell him."

"Oh!—but of course that is nonsense, or do you really know something about it?"

"Can you describe him?"

"I am afraid not—he looked distinguished."

"Hm! Well that is something of a guide, we can be on the watch for distinguished looking individuals; by the way he ought to thank you for that sort are rare."

"Oh, but you are laughing at me now!"

"Indeed I am not, I think I can find him."

"Do you, really? I hardly know when you are in earnest."

"I am very much in earnest now, Miss Lester. If you will stop thinking about the debt you owe him, I will guarantee to produce the man."

"Well, I won't think about it, but I am very curious."

"So I feared and you know the conditions of the agreement?"

"Oh, I begin to understand, well, I mean to put you to the test, I shall banish him from my memory, completely."

"Where are you taking me?" asked Joanna, suddenly looking through the window of the limousine.

"To Mrs. Hunter."

"Am I not to return to the hospital?"

"For the present, no. It is best that you should be out of it," he added, reading in Joanna's averted glance, her disappointment. "I do not apprehend anything serious, but it would be very unpleasant. There will certainly be a close reckoning of the miser's money, there is a chance for a family quarrel and you must not be drawn into it."

"And what about your keeping out of it?"

"Oh, I am out of it—I didn't hide the miser's money."

Yet, in spite of his careless tone, Joanna was conscious of a vague uneasiness.

"I hope you will not hesitate to call upon me for assistance, if at any time I can be of aid or, if you wish to unburden your mind to some discreet friend?"

"Thank you," said Joanna smiling down upon him from the top of the flight of steps. "I will remember, but oh, have you thought what the unburdening of my mind might be?"

"Yes, I have thought, and that was why I asked you."

Joanna's glance fell in confusion, she attempted a reply, and hesitated. Hogden climbed the steps until his eyes were on a level with hers.

"Do you promise?"

"Yes, I promise," returned Joanna, not feeling

sure of what she promised but finding Hogden's steady gaze extremely disconcerting.

"Good-night," said Hogden after a long breath.

"Good-night."

"Does it always take you as long as this to say 'Good-night' queried Mrs. Hunter drawing Joanna across the threshold and closing the door.

"Oh, don't, please," pleaded Joanna hiding her face on the elder woman's shoulder, "just take me in, and ask no questions."

"Did you think I was such a simpleton as that? No, indeed, Joanna Lester. March!"

CHAPTER XV

The Letter

Once upon a time—so runs an old fable—when the world was young, Love consented to leave his throne in the heavens to instruct the earth-born. Numerous directions and a few commands he gave them. The latter were to be implicitly obeyed, misfortune was sure to follow disobedience.

To each one was given the half of a silver star, and they were told to search for the one who had the missing half. If fortune attended and they found it, the radiant whole grew and grew until it lighted their pathway and shone for all who came within its radiance. But if they failed to find the right half and tried another which imperfectly fitted, the star burned dimly and gave little light, and might fade altogether.

Over and over Love charged them to make no mistake, for each pair constituted part of the great whole and, moreover, it was the greatest power in the world for good or evil. Also, the happiness of future generations depended on the brightness of the stars.

It is hard to say just what I know I must say. Do not think I have not understood all the difficulties which beset your path. Life is so complex, we are torn by so many conflicting desires, I sometimes

think, it is more of a wonder when we do the right thing than when we go wrong.

Forgive me, I keep you waiting for your answer while I moralize and you will think, perhaps, I am but a philosopher, and have no heart. But that is not true.

Dear Lynn, I cannot give you what you ask. It is just as hard for me to speak, as it is for you to hear, such a refusal. I tell you frankly, there was a time, when I wondered if I could not gather up the scattered threads of life and help you to weave them into something beautiful, serviceable and good.

But I cannot, now. Where has the feeling gone? I do not know. You must not think it is because I have not forgiven. I have forgiven fully, freely but—dear, I should be one of the “dim stars” you see.

But why can't we begin again? A clean, sane friendship? Suppose love has taken wings, we will have the next best thing. You think I speak in mockery? God forbid! Poor Lynn. I have shed so many tears, I want to help you—help you to begin life anew, you have your art and art is not fickle.

I have thought so much about your landscape painting—don't give it up. I feel that you have a wonderful future before you and I shall feel proud to aid, if I may, in any way a friend might aid.

You won't deny me your friendship, will you? And you will turn to art for consolation and let all lesser things go, to their secondary places.

J. L.

Stephens knew Joanna had not meant to be ironical, yet he wondered how the bitterness of the closing lines of her letter could have escaped her!

Her plea for friendship did not blind him, he knew she meant just that and nothing more. But he had hoped for more, and her refusal was a cruel blow. He was not sure he could accept her friendship, yet he knew it was sincere.

Then he called himself a "low bred cur," hers was the right to dictate terms, friendship was once all he could ask for, and it was more than he deserved.

As Stephens hesitated a moment, at the street corner, the church bells burst forth in a melodious peal. He had started out with no definite purpose, only to gain relief from his thoughts. It bored him intolerably to pass the day alone without companionship?

He had thought vaguely of seeing Joanna and refusing to believe that she had meant what she had written, but the half formed purpose ended with an impatient sigh and a muttered "what's the use."

The people filled the streets and moved slowly on their way to church. A whimsical thought seized Stephens, "he would go to church."

His wife had been regular in her attendance and he had grown tired of following in her wake and forever mumbling introductions to people who looked over him and past him, as if unaware they were face to face with another individual.

The usher politely apologized for giving him a seat so far in the rear. A very unusual thing he thought, and he looked about him. The church was certainly filled, even to the aisles in front and there was an air of suppressed excitement throughout the congregation. Stephens settled back comfortably, this promised a little distraction, hence comfort.

When David Hogden entered the pulpit that morning all thought of self was forced into the background. It was, probably the last sermon he would ever preach in that pulpit—perhaps from any pulpit—and his voluntary resignation had not been reached, without much painful thought. He could not waste this last opportunity in any thought of self.

Owing to the feeble eyesight of the aged, it was his custom, when entering the pulpit, to look for the desired text, arrange whatever notices he was asked to read and then to sit while the choir sang. On this particular Sunday morning, he entered and sank at once into his seat.

It was not until he arose and stood before the congregation that Stephens recognized him. Involuntarily he assumed an attentive attitude.

David Hogden announced his text in a calm, clear voice; "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these, my children, ye did it unto me."

The audience relaxed preceptibly, the Reverend David Hogden had often preached on similar topics; this was not what they had expected, and each assumed his favorite position, as he prepared to listen. But the next words startled them however, into something of their former attitude.

"Beloved, I wish to relate to you a personal incident—an incident of my own life. I trust you will pardon me, for the sake of the truth involved and because I feel constrained to tell you this; knowing that sometimes my conduct has seemed to you inexplicable."

Stephens, listening, heard an incident of his own life related. It was singular, he thought after a lapse of years, he should be hearing about it now.

"A criminal serving a long sentence, was pardoned for good conduct. Released, he found himself a stranger in a strange land. He was a young man when prison walls engulfed him, he emerged bent and old, an outcast whom all shunned.

Two children, brother and sister, treated him kindly, and he gave his life to save a train, thinking they were aboard."

Stephens, with other passengers, had looked down upon the huddled bundle of clothing, and wondered idly how it all came about, and now, for the first time he was hearing the story from the dead man's point of view. He was conscious of a tightness in his throat while he listened and many in the congregation wiped away tears.

David Hogden was putting all his strength into this last effort. All his life he had pled for the weak and erring, he was being turned out, now, because of it. He was laying bare his heart—would they, for his sake remember what he had tried to teach? He closed the bible and stood for one moment looking down upon the uplifted faces; "God's plans for us are for our ultimate happiness and if we fail to achieve it, it is because his laws are imperfectly obeyed."

"And what shall we say to those who, through selfishness, indifference or preoccupation allow another to pass unaided? Was not His express command "bear ye one another's burdens?" And even your Church, O Christ, stands guilty." Then David Hogden descended from the pulpit, while the waiting congregation held its breath.

"Beloved, I come to you as brother comes to brother. As some of you know, this church is the

best of my life work. It seems best that I leave it for younger and abler hands to bring to a fitting consummation, but I have loved it well, and for that reason, you have borne with an old man's incapacity. God grant that neither my work nor yours shall be without fruit. Let us remember that love is the only thing that abides and endures, and if we have all wealth, all power, and have not love it availeth us nothing. God cannot dwell in the heart where there is no love. Beloved, may you ever be found among those who are weighed and found not wanting."

The First Church was nothing if not correct, the people filed up to shake their pastor's hand, many did it perfunctorily, but if David Hogden perceived it, none knew.

Stephens moved on with the rest hardly knowing if the Reverend David Hogden would remember that they had met.

"This is fortunate" said the latter as he grasped his hand, "I have a message for you—see you in a moment."

Stephens moved to one side and waited, wondering if the reverend gentleman had not been mistaken in his identity.

It was over at last, the morning papers announced it appropriately; "The Reverend David Hogden takes leave of his congregation. His people take him by the hand, much feeling shown."

The crowd made its way slowly to the street, little groups, here and there, lingered for a few moments' conversation.

David Hogden and Stephens passed out together.

"Perhaps my message was a misnomer, it is more a matter of business; a company of scientists are

going North along the Newfoundland and Labrador coasts, they wished to take an artist with them. Mrs. Hunter has given them your name and she wished me to speak to you."

"I am very grateful to you both, but this is such a surprise. I hardly know—"

"You will have some weeks in which to consider it. In the meantime come out and see me."

"Thanks, I'll be glad to come. I think I am spelled failure in large letters."

"Failure! Oh, no, you have half a life time yet to make good. Failure has nothing to do with men of your age."

Stephens quitted David Hogden with regret. "Don't forget me," said the latter as he shook Stephens' hand, "I shall be lonely now and you will find a warm welcome awaiting you, whenever you please to call."

It was Stephens' custom to dine at the club on Sunday afternoons and to-day he wanted to talk over this new project, so suddenly thrown open to him, with some of his brother artists. He found Bruyere and a cartoonist, Van Sinclair by name, lingering over their cigars.

"It's going to make a considerable stir," the latter was saying.

"What is going to make a stir?" asked Stephens throwing himself into a chair and lighting a cigar.

"J. Twiller is dead."

"Well, who is J. Twiller?"

"You don't mean to say that you have never heard of J. Twiller? Well, he is a miser and has been no end of a freak. And lately, it seems, he deemed it the appropriate time to shuffle off this mortal coil and—he's dead."

"Is that all there is to the story?"

"No, that is just the beginning. It seems the old fellow has had "rats in his garret" for some time. He lived alone in the top of the house and didn't want any of the family near him. His grandson, young Jim, has lived with him, or below him, rather. J. Twiller's elder son E. G. Twiller, had begun to suspect his nephew of borrowing without leave from his grandfather exchequer and he tried to prove his father J. Twiller insane.

But he went to the wrong man, Hogden, from the City Hospital made light of the insanity idea, but he sent a nurse to care for the miser. The young lady evidently had a mind of her own for she hid J. Twiller's money. They didn't find it, at first, and went to the hospital to give Hogden a bad quarter of an hour, and he sent them back to look for the money, flatly refusing to reveal the name or the whereabouts of the nurse.

They found the money but "E. G." claims some of it is missing; young Jim says the nurse stole it. Hogden won't budge and there the matter stands. E. G. Twiller has some influence with the powers that be, and he threatens to lose Hogden's job for him. There's a great scrap in it for somebody, but it is hardly my line. Well, I must be moving, so long."

Stephens puffed his cigar in silence. He was thinking of Van Sinclair's story. It seemed to him he was beginning to see the light.

"What's the grouch?" asked Bruyere.

"Oh, nothing, I was thinking of Sinclair's story."

"A devil of a mix up. I wouldn't be surprised if Jim Twiller could account for the missing money—he is a bad sort.

"Anything new?" he asked, after both had smoked a few moments in silence.

"Yes," Stephens removed his cigar. "I learned to-day that I am likely to have the opportunity to take a trip north along the coast with a party of scientists. A fair salary and a chance to put in considerable time for myself. I have been thinking it over and if I receive the offer, I believe I will go."

"Sounds good," puffed Bruyere, "I have been deciding on a new departure myself—interior decorations. It's not quite in my line, but a good salary goes with it, and we are forced to think of that, unless we are to remain bachelors for the rest of our natural lives."

Stephens glanced sharply at his friend, but Bruyere chose to appear unaware of it. "I have an engagement with Miss Lendenning at five—will walk part way, with you, if you are going home."

"Don't forget to tell me if you decide to take that prospective trip?" said Bruyere as the two separated.

"Lucky fellow" muttered Stephens, while he searched in his pockets for his key, "he has a wife and home in prospect. I wonder if it is the peerless Julia?"

The hall was dark, and with a muttered imprecation of the carelessness of janitors in general, Stephens stumbled to his studio door. He found it unlocked, and entered.

Under the softened lights of the chandelier, her lace scarf falling from her uncovered shoulders, sat Julia Lendenning.

CHAPTER XVI

Stephens Makes a Decision

Stephens' first thought was one of displeasure, followed by one of distrust and uneasiness. He was aware, without admitting it to himself, that Julia Lendenning had a power over him. Just what this visit portended he did not know.

Miss Lendenning lowered the paper she had been reading, and smiled as he advanced. "My patience has been all but exhausted, but you are here at last."

"Yes, I am here," said Stephens dryly, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and looking down at her, awaiting some explanation of her presence.

Miss Lendenning drew her white draperies closer, about her feet. "Won't you sit down?" she asked motioning to the vacant seat by her side.

"Have you anything to say to me that I can't hear standing?"

She burst into a peal of soft laughter. "You absurd boy! I only wanted you to be comfortable. There, that is better; I am sure that it is easier to sit. Now shall I tell you why I have come?"

"As you please."

Miss Lendenning toyed with the ivory handled paper knife; "I wanted you to tell me what you thought of it—my gown, I mean."

"A matchless creation of its kind, I expect," he

said as she arose and turned slowly around before him.

"Is that all you can say?"

"What do you want me to say? I don't know anything about women's dresses; have you come all this distance just for that?"

Miss Lendenning affected a pout; I suppose it couldn't occur to you that I cared for your opinion?"

"No, it hadn't occurred to me."

The eyes under the drooping lashes glowed with ominous fire, but she looked up with a daring smile, "I came to ask you to take me to the opera," she said.

Stephens felt a thrill of admiration for her beauty and audacity; the next moment came the thought of Bruyere; "You have made a mistake," he said with a certain grim humor for the situation. "In your multiplicity of attendants you have taken the wrong one."

"Lynn," laying a hand on his arm and speaking in a beseeching tone, "Don't be cross with me, he asked me to go, but I didn't want to go with him. Perhaps he didn't understand and took too much for granted. You men don't have to wait till the right one comes, and if we take matters into our own hands, you judge us harshly."

Stephens hesitated. But Miss Lendenning checked the softened feeling he had for her, by her next remark, and sent his thoughts, at once, into a new channel.

"I wonder if you have heard something, Lynn?"

"Heard something? Oh, of course everybody hears everything now a days."

"I can't think you have heard this," studying him

from under the long lashes, "you seem so unconcerned."

"Has this mysterious something, anything to do with me?"

"Very much to do with you."

Stephens looked at her, how perfect that wave of hair from the forehead, the shell like ear just peeping from beneath. He had sketched her many times, but her present pose was perfect.

"Well, when you decide what you think of me—"

"I can have but one opinion, and that, you know, would be flattering to you."

"How could I know anything at all about it—praise comes so grudgingly from your lips."

"Does it? Well, we will let that pass. Am I to be told that mysterious something which concerns me?"

"I don't want to tell you," plaintively.

"That means, I suppose, that you came here for that particular purpose?"

"Lynn!"

Stephens shrugged his shoulders and walked the length of the studio, leaving Miss Lendenning to follow him with dangerous eyes. "Well," he said coolly, returning.

"Are you trying to quarrel with me, Lynn?"

Stephens' sudden anger had evaporated. He was feeling that nothing mattered very much. He wouldn't be such an ass that he would quarrel with a friend over a little grievance.

But Miss Lendenning did not understand this feeling, she returned to the attack.

"I don't understand you, Lynn, I came with the best of intentions thinking you would appreciate."

"We will take it for granted that I do," replied Stephens wearily, "to what do you refer?"

"Why, to Miss Lester."

"Will you be good enough to explain?" Stephens' tone was hard.

"You needn't think I have not known, Lynn Stephens," cried Miss Lendenning in sudden passion and she, you put before me, is betrothed to another man."

In spite of himself, Stephens visibly winced.

"She is false to you, Lynn, why won't you believe me? Hogden, the doctor, has spirited her away because she has stolen the miser's money."

"It's a lie!" said Stephens hoarsely.

"It is not; you shall believe me. It is on everybody's tongue—I saw her myself."

"You saw her!" echoed Stephens slowly, a light beginning to break in upon him, and he thought he saw, in its illuminating flash, the reason for some things unexplained in Joanna's letter.

"Yes, I went there to see her, I had a right. You shall hear me Lynn Stephens," catching at his arm.

"You have deceived me, you let me give love, and now you would cast me aside for this Miss Lester. She is cold—a woman of ice—neither is she true to you for she is betrothed to the doctor—it is known by everybody."

"Be still," wrenching from her grasp, "I don't wish to hear you speak her name. I doubtless owe to you the frustrations of all my earthly hopes. If that gives you comfort, you have it."

"Lynn!"

Stephens turned on his heel, wrath and pain kept him silent.

"Lynn!" she followed him and gently touched his arm; "You aren't going to leave me like this, are you? We were such good friends before she came. Don't you care for me, Lynn?"

Stephens turned; whatever reparation he owed this girl, he was not thinking of it then. He was thinking of his wounded pride, of Joanna's vanished trust.

"From young Earle, a degenerate cur, to Eugene Bruyere, as good a fellow as ever breathed, there is a long list. Where I come in, does not matter, we are all pawns in the game. But isn't it rather absurd to talk of caring?"

It was a brutal speech, Miss Lendenning looked like a beautiful tigress about to spring. Suddenly she leaned forward and struck Stephens, with her open palm, across the face.

A dull red crept up to his forehead, but he neither moved nor spoke. As he stood motionless, watching her leave the room, an ironical smile crossed his face.

An unsusceptible man was, to Miss Lendenning, like the wildest Mustang to the broncho buster; every faculty is alert to subdue the spirit of the beast he strides, knowing well unless he succeeds, his reputation as a horse breaker is gone forever. By every motion of her graceful figure, her beauty as she stood, for a moment, in the soft radiance of the lamp, she reminded him of the loss he had sustained, in forfeiting her good will. At the door, she turned for one backward glance of mingled hauteur and daring coquetry.

Stephens seated himself heavily as the door closed.

"What was there for him to do? If he should see Joanna make a clean breast of it—would it be of

any avail? He had not mentioned Miss Lendenning in his letter to her for several reasons. He knew he was not without blame in the affair, but his gorge rose at the thought of telling Joanna.

He had liked Julia Lendenning, no doubt, he had let her flirt with him; she enjoyed the game and he was a married man, it didn't promise to be dangerous, but now——

Stephens moved uneasily. He thought he would give his right hand if Joanna would trust him as she once had trusted. He had bared his heart to her, and she had not believed. But he did not blame her. What Julia Lendenning had told her, he did not know, but he knew she would make her evidence as damning as possible.

It would have been better if he had concluded her in his confession, but how was he to know the woman could work such mischief?

He arose, lighted a cigar and began to move restlessly about the room, to return finally to his favorite chair. Here he sat, lost in thought, till his cigar went out in his fingers. He was aroused by a knock at the door, and, without waiting for reply, Hogden entered.

"So I find you at last."

"Come in, have you been trying to find me?"

"Yes, I called yesterday, but the janitor said you were out of town."

"Took a little run over into New Jersey—sorry you found me absent. Take a cigar."

"Thanks, I seldom smoke; I discovered my patients didn't like it."

"I had no idea you doctors were such martyrs," returned Stephens, "but then you can take your revenge when you are dealing out your doses."

"Yes, we might."

"You don't mean to say you don't? I didn't suppose your profession was noted for saints, more than mine for angels."

"There is a whole lot there, that has not yet been discovered. But let me state my errand, for a doctor is never sure what the next moment may bring. You have been informed, I think of the party of scientists, who go north in a few weeks?"

Stephens nodded.

"One of them happened to be a friend of mine and he directed me to leave this with you," taking some papers from his pocket. "If you care for my opinion I think it is a good opportunity, these men are all enthusiasts and you would go far to find a better lot."

Stephens was touched by Hogden's interest, he did not know it was the latter's "good word" which had brought him recognition. If he could have known to what Hogden's kindness was really due, he might have coldly declined it, but it was kindness, kindness of a rare sort.

Hogden saw in Stephens a rival and he was trying to help him for Joanna's sake.

"How long do you expect to be absent on this trip?"

"Probably through the summer."

Stephens looked thoughtfully into space. Seven months was a long time and Joanna—"I will think it over," he said slowly.

"Do so, and when you have decided let Professor Henderson know your decision. How are you feeling, pretty fit?"

"Yes, and working like a treadmill nag."

"The strenuous life is hardly the thing for you," said Hogden slowly, "at least, for the present. If this trip didn't mean life in the open air, I should say 'cut it out.'"

"Curious, how we disagree," smiled Stephens, "the thought of roughing it, was one of the reasons that made me hesitate."

"No doubt; man seldom takes kindly to his medicine."

"Here's success to you, but remember there is a limit to the strenuous."

Seating himself, after Hogden had gone, Stephens read the papers carefully, folded and slipped them back into the envelope.

"Should he accept this offer or should he not?"

The more he thought about it, the harder it was for him to decide. What if he should write Joanna, tell her everything, and abide by her decision. He hesitated. Was he going too far? But she had asked for his friendship, and he was asking only for the advice of a friend.

He seated himself at his desk.

CHAPTER XVII

Mrs. Hunter Plans

The twilight shadows were beginning to steal into Mrs. Hunter's study. Joanna looked up from her writing. Mrs. Hunter should have returned long before this. She sealed and directed her letter, it had occupied her at least two hours. She wondered if Stephens would understand the spirit in which it was written. To arouse his enthusiasm, to encourage, and yet to make it clear, that it was only the heart of a friend that spoke through her words, required skill. She had put her whole soul into the effort to restore his faith in himself and art.

"You remember," she wrote, "the goal you once set for yourself? it is there waiting for you to arrive, and believe me, each one of us has something to perform, which only we can do. Forget the disappointments, forget that life sometimes shows a seamy side; you know we never attain great heights without the climb, and that is rather exhilarating, when once we are started. It is the dread of the start that ties us ignominiously at the foot of the mountain.

"You tell me youth and its enthusiasm have faded, oh, my friend, that is such a great calamity, I refuse to believe it. Search the inmost recesses of the heart and see if you find not there some hidden ideals, seize on them and begin anew.

"It is not fancy, dear friend, I surely hear your 'excelsior' far up the heights."

She hardly knew whether his mention of Julia Lendenning pleased or displeased her; whatever hold the young woman had on him, he bitterly resented it, that much she understood. It was becoming apparent to her, that her friendship, might injure as well as aid. It was not without a pang, that she perceived it, but to recognize the need was to act, with Joanna. Hence in reply to his appeal, personalities sank out of sight, she became the spirit of genius urging him to action.

Joanna was feeling the lassitude which follows supreme effort. She sat with listless gaze on the glowing coals which were continually dropping and losing their fiery color.

"Must I become like a mole?" said a voice from the door, "won't you ring for lights, please."

"Tell me," said Joanna with suppressed eagerness, as she complied with Mrs. Hunter's request. "What did Dr. Hogden say?"

"My dear Joanna, you surely cannot expect me to tell you all that individual said, in a breath?"

"If you will tell Nellie to bring the tea things to this room we will have tea here, and over the tea cups my flagging spirits will revive and I will tell you the whole story."

"Now," said Mrs. Hunter, as they were cosily settled, "Where shall I begin?"

"Tell me just what Doctor Hogden said."

"Let me see," leisurely sipping her tea, "He asked me if you had recovered from the unpleasantness of your late experience; secondly, if you had obeyed his orders; thirdly, he said you were to obey

me entirely in this matter, and if you persisted in foolishly trying to placate the dissatisfied heirs to the miser's money, I was to lock you up and he sent you this."

Joanna hastily tore open the letter; "My dear Miss Lester,

If you *must* tell, of course you must. Write to me once or even a dozen times a day but let me be the only one to receive your confession.

R. Hogden."

"That is so like Richard," laughed Mrs. Hunter, "but seriously, my dear, he says it is but a quarrel between the heirs, they are using you as a cat's paw to escape the consequence of their own guilt."

"But—did he—has he seen the papers?"

"Ugh! the dirty sheets! They make me furious, but Richard pretends to laugh at them. He advises leaving them unread, but those horrid headlines tantalize me.

"I think, my dear, this ought to convince you, that you have masqueraded long enough. Forgive me, I should have bitten off my tongue before saying that. It comes with ill grace from me, especially, as I am about to ask of you a very great favor."

Joanna looked up inquiringly.

Mrs. Hunter returned her tea cup to the table and resumed her seat, hands clasped in her lap and gaze fixed thoughtfully on the fire.

"It is my plan," she began, "I thought of it long ago but Richard was stubborn, quite stubborn. I spoke to him to-day. He is worried and perplexed" continued Mrs. Hunter after a pause, and ignoring Joanna's pained look of inquiry, "and he consented, if you are willing to go.

"Be patient, my dear, and I will explain, only let me tell the story in my own way, please."

"It was just forty nine years ago, that Herbert Hogden, Richard's father and my sister Nellie were to have been married, but he jilted her, he married seventy thousand dollars and Pamela Poindexter. And Nellie, poor Nellie, she was gentle and loving while I was proud and assertive. It was long ago, yet I remember it, as if it were but yesterday, Nellie was confined to the house the day the dreadful news came, she was always delicate. I went to the city that morning, we were commuters then from New Jersey.

"I learned of the wedding from the morning papers, but I would not believe it; I went boldly to Herbert Hogden's home, his father received me, a hard hearted old man, though he was a minister. He listened gravely, while I stated the reason of my visit and showed him the newspaper report.

"Is it the truth? I demanded.

"He was married yesterday, but the newspapers are not entirely correct. And then my wrath broke forth. I forgot to whom I was talking, it wouldn't have made any difference—I was fighting Nellie's battles.

"The Rev. David Hogden listened to me grim and silent, his silence angered me, and I began to give way to fiercer invectives when David, the younger son touched my arm. The sight of his face brought me to my senses and I turned and left the room: He followed me, and tried to ask my forgiveness for his brother's act. Poor David, his tears did not soften me, then, but I have been sorry since.

"When I came home to Nellie, I found her sitting

like a marble statue the dreadful news had outstripped me. She did not answer my ravings, till I maligned Herbert Hogden, then she arose, with such a look, it broke my heart, even while I raved. 'You know I love Herbert, you will please—never mention his name to me again,' she said. And I never did; neither his name, nor that of his family was ever mentioned in our house.

"When the old year went, Nellie went with it. For her sake I have tried to think kindly of Herbert Hogden. His life with Pamela Poindexter has not been a happy one. I never liked Pamela. We were rivals in our school days, but I seldom see her now.

"I don't know why I am telling you this," said Mrs. Hunter arousing herself after a pause, in which she had silently contemplated the fire, "only I wanted you to understand the back ground of Richard's grievance.

"Herbert Hogden had one son, Richard, doctor Hogden. Herbert was like his father, the reverend David Hogden, senior—harsh and tyrannical. Richard, but I will not tell you that, you will hear it, with all the needed embellishments, from his mother, enough to say he is not received at his father's house. And I am sure if Herbert Hogden dies, without being reconciled to his son, life will not be the same to Richard. He has tried, but to no purpose.

"Pamela Hogden considers herself a confirmed invalid, she wants you, Joanna. It will not be pleasant; I venture to say you will have a very fair knowledge of hades itself, after living with her. I am asking for a great deal, Joanna, but it is for Richard's sake.

"I have been a cold and selfish woman, thinking only of my own pleasure and my selfishness has cost me my husband and son. But we have had enough of unhappiness to-night, we will leave the story. The Lord has given me Richard and he is all I have, unless it is you.

"You must not make me cry, Joanna," as Joanna rested her cheek on the puffs of snow white hair, "I wouldn't cry, not for anything, now—in the world, you know you sing at the Hollisters' to-night, and I shall accompany the famous singer—the society leader without a heart. Put on your most becoming gown, my dear, and wear my turquois and pearls; I have worn them but once and I never shall again. Sometime I will tell you the story, but not to-night—I cannot open more old wounds to-night. Oh, what are the hearts of us women but a bit of silk and lace and a pin!"

CHAPTER XVIII

The Changeling's Mother

The white and gold clock on the mantel, supported by the figure of Father Time, tinkled nine. But Mrs. Herbert Hogden did not heed it, she was still in bed and deeply concerned over what she should have for breakfast. A dyspeptic and quasi invalid, most of her mornings were spent in that way. Her favorite occupation was writing menus for her meals.

"There, that will do, Miss Lester," to Joanna, who was arranging the breakfast the maid had brought in. "Sit down where you will be within reach. I hardly think I feel as well this morning, every effort exhausts me," and she sank back on the pillows, but continued to gaze at the array of eatables on the dainty little table at her side.

"Do you know, Miss Lester, I have had such severe trials—such trials!" and Mrs. Hogden closed her eyes murmuring faintly, "they would boil my eggs three minutes and a half when I said three minutes."

Joanna involuntarily smiled.

"You have no idea, I suppose, what it means to be an invalid?" asked Mrs. Hogden, languidly opening her eyes.

Joanna confessed her ignorance.

"Nobody seems to understand, and when one's

husband is totally oblivious of one's existence—business—business—business from morning till night, and his wife dying of neglect."

If neglect meant three people to spend the morning administering to her wants, then she was certainly neglected, but Joanna's comment was not vocally expressed.

Mrs. Hogden nibbled a bit of bouillon-soaked cracker. "I was married young, horribly young; I didn't suppose it were possible for a man to be so unchivalrous, that is what one gets by marrying beneath them."

Mrs. Hogden had evidently been mistaken in her appetite, bouillon, eggs and toast, and the breast of a chicken disappeared with wonderful rapidity; "If you will ring, Miss Lester, I think I will take my coffee now, be sure it is newly made." She not only drank the coffee, but ordered another slice of toast, and fruit followed.

"Remove the breakfast please Miss Lester, I will rest awhile, I feel unusually fatigued this morning. I really wish you would put aside your work, are you always so busy?—it is quite distressing to see you—It is like my husband, he is always so busy—it is so plebian!"

Joanna let her hands fall idly in her lap.

"You were never married, Miss Lester?"

"You may consider yourself a very fortunate woman; men, the best of them, are so disappointing in married life.

"Is Elizabeth Hunter a friend of yours?"

"Yes" Joanna had learned in the three days of her service, that it was best to answer Mrs. Hogden's queries by monosyllables.

"You are a wonder, Miss Lester, yes, a real wonder."

Joanna's inward amusement revealed itself in a shadowy sort of a smile.

"You may lower the shades, and bring me something from the library.

Joanna liked the library, she thought it the only really habitable room in this superb Fifth Avenue mansion. She made a survey of the shelves, but found nothing likely to interest her patient; finally she selected a magazine, and smiled when she thought that the highly colored illustrations had determined her choice. Somehow one couldn't associate Mrs. Hogden with neutral colors.

A group of pictures on the desk attracted her attention. From the wee toddler, to manhood they were of one individual—Richard Hogden. They had been placed there without any attempt at beauty of arrangement; placed there evidently, because it was where the eye would most likely rest if one was sitting at the desk. And no one sat at that desk, but Herbert Hogden, the owner of this princely home. Though living under the same roof, Joanna had not met the financier but she felt sure he had not forgotten his son.

She returned to her patient. Mrs. Hogden had changed her mind—she did not care to read, but would arise and dress. This process lasted some hours; at last, clothed and, supposedly in her right mind, she decided to write some letters. But she soon found it too fatiguing and ordered Joanna to take her place at the desk.

"You may tell Mrs. Hillis that I will finish that altar cloth in a week or two. I never go out, but few do more for the church than I do."

"But why do you not go out Mrs. Hogden? I think it would do you good."

The person thus addressed looked aghast at the proposition. "It is really impossible," she replied stiffly, "your suggestion, Miss Lester, was made without any knowledge of existing circumstances, and of course is utterly useless."

The scratching of the pen on the paper was the only reply.

"I am a woman of many peculiar trials," continued Mrs. Hogden after an interval of silence, "I seldom speak of them, but they have quite crushed me. The world knows how our son disregarded our wishes. He left us and went out into the world to earn his living—to think of a Poindexter doing that!—and of course he has dropped to a lower level. Oh, the disgrace of it! the shame of it! and my husband does not seem to understand."

Scratch! scratch! went the pen, Joanna hurried on, careless of blots.

"It was a terrible blow—terrible! It made a re-cluse of me, I had not the strength to endure it—my only son! Richard was like his father—no Poindexter blood—and I am glad, now, no Poindexter would have done it."

Joanna's pen made a vicious jab at the "P" in Poindexter making a huge blot.

"Such a severe blow," murmured Mrs. Hogden leaning back on the cushions, and gently moving a jeweled fan.

"Why did your son make such an unfortunate decision?"

"Why? That is what I have asked myself so many times! He was engaged to my niece, a Poin-

dexter on her mother's side, and he deliberately ignored her, ignored my counsel—his mother's counsel—he, my son, born of a Poindexter, chose poverty rather than obey his parents. It has broken my heart!" and Mrs. Hogden once more sank back on her pillows and closed her eyes, with a very languid air, yet without, it must be confessed, any appearance of real feeling.

"It is strange you never married, Miss Lester," she said opening her eyes to stare curiously at Joanna.

"I never had the time."

"Now, that is odd; it really does not take so very long to get one's trousseau together. My own came from Paris, everything, even to my stockings, you don't see such now-a-days. My entire outfit, even to my stockings!

"My niece, Harriet Lovell, my son's affianced wife, is a Poindexter every inch—such a dear, beautiful girl."

Joanna had an almost irresistible desire to ask if the house contained anything revealing this "dear beautiful girl," but she merely remarked; "She is married, I suppose."

"Oh, no, how could she? She is the first Poindexter that was ever jilted. She told me that hers was the first blot on the family name, she should try to remove it, but I have given up hope. Nobody knows where my unhappy son is—unless it is Elizabeth Hunter. That woman actually had the boldness to come to me, after my son's departure, and tell me I was to blame—I to blame—the thought of it wearies me even at this distant day. We Poindexters pay a great price for our finer sensibilities."

"Couldn't you find another pen, Miss Lester? The scratching of that one is quite annoying."

Joanna made another journey to the library; returning, she found Mrs. Hogden occupied with a caller, and she sat down by a distant window. Fragments of conversation came to her ears.

"Man has long been the oppressor, woman the oppressed."

"That may be said of men in general, but the men of my family—the Poindexters—were men of chivalry."

Mrs. Winter pursed her thin lips. Andrew Poindexter, a nephew of her hostess, was at that moment serving a sentence for embezzlement. But she couldn't mention it of course, Mrs. Hogden might give her a large subscription if she chose.

"It is wonderful, how this suffrage movement has advanced, the ladies rush into the ranks by hundreds."

"Yes, I am greatly interested in it."

Mrs. Winter's eyes sparkled; "I am so glad to hear you say that, I have always felt that women should have the ballot, many are the reforms we can bring about when we have the glorious ballot. Now if you will be so kind."

"I don't wish to dampen your enthusiasm, but I cannot approve of your methods."

"To what do you refer?" asked her visitor, feeling five hundred dollars was vanishing into thin air.

"All reform, to be really successful, must come from the upper strata in society and work downward, percolating through to the lower ranks, who are unable to rise of themselves. I gather, from

what you say, that you invite the cooperation of women from all grades of society, which is, I think a mistake."

"Oh, of course the movement as yet, has not gained sure footing, is not thoroughly organized, but we are retarded for lack of funds, if we could only obtain needed funds, we could do much more."

"Miss Lester, will you write a check for Mrs. Winter, for fifty dollars."

"To think a Poindexter must endure the demands of impecunious commoners," said Mrs. Hogden as the door closed upon her visitor.

"Will you go to the library, Miss Lester, and bring me something of a quieting nature?"

Joanna paused once more before the group of photographs, looking at them one by one.

"How can you be the son of that perverse woman upstairs?" she said, "you, Richard Hogden, the noblest man I ever knew. No wonder she thought she had borne a changeling—that is the way our blessings come to us in disguise."

CHAPTER XIX

Joanna Wins A Victory

Joanna left Mrs. Hogden's apartments that evening feeling so exhausted in body and mind she wondered, as she descended the wide stairway, if what she hoped to gain was worth the price she paid. And what was it she hoped for? A reconciliation, of parents and son! Had she not indulged herself in another visit to Utopia? Her cogitations ended in a vexed laugh. "It is ridiculous, I suppose, but I care too much for his approval to abandon, even a forlorn hope."

As she neared the library door, which was slightly ajar, she was startled by the sound of a groan, of great physical or mental distress. She stepped instantly into the room. It was dark, save the light from the fireplace, and for a moment, the huddled form near at hand escaped her notice. But only for a moment, in an instant the room was filled with light and she was bending over the form on the sofa.

With the professional instinct of the trained nurse, Joanna set to work. The patient's shoes were removed, a hot water bottle placed at his feet, his collar and tie vanished as if by magic, his cramped limbs straightened, and he was wrapped in warm blankets. Her only words had been a command to

drink, as she placed the cup at his lips. She tested his pulse, gently changed the pillows under his head and then for the first time, she sat down in the chair by his side and looked at him.

A pair of keen, scrutinizing gray eyes returned her look, from out a pain drawn old face.

"Who or what are you?" he said.

Joanna smiled.

"You didn't come through the key hole, or down the chimney?"

She shook her head.

"Nor start up from those black shadows that were over there?"

Another shake of the head.

"Who are you and how did you get here? Can't you talk? If you can't you are the first woman I ever saw that couldn't."

Joanna hastened to explain; "I am Mrs. Hogden's nurse—I was in the hall and I heard you."

"Oh, you are my wife's nurse?" after a pause; hadn't you better to back to her?"

"No, I am taking care of you now."

"Hm, did any one tell you I needed to be taken care of?"

"Yes, my professional instinct. I don't wish to alarm you, but you ought to be very careful, avoid all excitement, you should, also, be very careful about your diet, and, if possible, take two hours each day for luncheon."

"You don't give your advice for nothing, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes, I do—only be sure you follow it."

"How long have you been here?"

"Four days."

"Do you expect to stay long!?"

"That depends on Mrs. Hogden's illness."

"I'll tell you," said the millionaire, rising on one elbow with difficulty and emphasizing his words with a long forefinger.

"You must flatter her—flatter her, and she will keep you forever."

"Do you approve of flattery?"

"She does, and that's the main thing. Why you would give people what they liked wouldn't you?"

"Not if it was harmful."

Joanna's reply seemed to afford the elder Hogden much amusement, he gave utterance to a chuckling laugh.

"You find the idea amusing?"

"Young woman, if a man wants to buy stock, I sell him stock. Do you suppose I stop to ask if it is best for him to buy? That isn't my business and he wouldn't like it if I did. No, he wants to buy stock, and I want to sell and that's all there is of it."

"But suppose," smiled Joanna, "you were the one wanting to buy stock or thought you did, but you really didn't—wouldn't you feel grateful for advice to keep out of the market?"

The financier's eyes narrowed to pin points of light, he shook his long finger.

"Nobody gets ahead of me you understand, nobody—I rule the market."

Joanna leaned forward and laid her fingers lightly on the extended wrist.

"Let's not talk about stock any more," whimsically. "Let's talk about dresses."

Hogden, senior, grinned.

"Very well—you have the floor—I'll listen."

"To begin with, I wonder for which you most admire a woman, her wit, her dress, or her heart?"

Her listener's face grew grave as she finished, she knew by his expression that his thoughts were far away. His next words gave her a start of surprise.

"You don't happen to know a doctor Hogden, do you?"

"Yes, indeed, everyone knows doctor Hogden, he is a leader in his profession," then with her whimsical smile, she added, "he sent me here."

The narrowed eyes opened in trembling amazement.

"He sent you here," echoed Hogden the elder, his hand unconsciously stretching forth to touch a fold of her gown.

Joanna felt a sudden twinge, through her, he had touched his son. Herbert Hogden might be the man he was reputed to be, on Wall Street, but she was sure he loved his son.

"How long have you known my—Dr. Hogden?"

"By reputation several years, by actual acquaintance several months."

He meditated several moments and then asked a blunt question;

"Has my wife told you about our son?"

Joanna hesitated, "she told me,"—she began.

"She tells everything," interrupted Hogden senior.

"What has doctor Hogden told you?"

"Nothing."

"You knew he was my son before you came, eh?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hunter told me."

"Hm, very intelligent woman, Mrs. Hunter. But she doesn't like me."

"She is very fond of your son, and she would like you, if you would let her."

This struck the Wall Street ruler as being supremely funny, he emitted a series of chuckles.

"I shan't offer any objections to her liking me, I am willing she should. How much money does she want?" he added still chuckling.

"You do her an injustice—you know it is not that!"

The keen eyes narrowed and looked at her searchingly.

"Elizabeth Hunter knows the worth of money, but she likes to spend it, all women do."

Here a spasm of pain racked the millionaire's body; he fought it as stubbornly as he fought his foes, yet his gratitude to Joanna for relief, she thought, was quite pathetic.

"You need the best of medical counsel," she said when he was resting comfortably again, "I wish you would see Dr. Hogden, I have great faith in his skill."

"Hm, what do you think ails me?"

"I am only a nurse, that is a question for a doctor, you must remember the elasticity of youth has gone, you must use your strength with as little waste as possible, have you had many attacks like this?"

"Kingston quoted eight and three quarters—upwards of a million," was the muttered reply; "What did you say young lady?"

"Have you had attacks like this before?"

"Maybe I have, and maybe I haven't, you'd like to give up your job, eh?"

"Not yet—I'll stay if you will obey orders."

This reply furnished him some amusement.

"Set upon, in my own house, and trussed and basted, and now, you inform me, if I'll obey orders you'll stay—what for?—to continue the trussing and basting, I suppose."

"Yes, only I call it by another name."

"No doubt, young woman, no doubt. You deceive us by misrepresentation, corner us by false statements, water us with your medicine, yet because it is medicine and not stock, you are to be judged by another standard."

The clock struck the half hour.

"Shall we agree to a truce and suspend hostilities?"

"Yes, that is as convenient a way as any, when the day is lost."

"I had to retreat for fear of being completely demolished, you have fired hot shot at me ever since I entered, discretion is the better part of valor—it is time I ran. Shall I call some one to your assistance?"

"No, I shall sleep here for the present."

"Oh, no!" cried Joanna in distress, "you must not—let me help you, I am strong."

Herbert Hogden had spent several nights where he was—nights of misery moreover, Joanna's sudden appearance and his comparative ease following her treatment, effected him, he sat up.

"You have not told me your name?"

"Joanna Lester."

"Doctor Jo—will you bring me my cane?" Then leaning heavily on her shoulder they began the journey.

Joanna felt a misgiving as they began the ascent of the stairs, she had not realized his weakness.

With a quick movement, she slipped one arm around him, "lean on me," she said; and for the first time in many years Herbert Hogden clung helplessly to another human being.

His breath came hard, his face was drawn and pale, he had discarded his cane and clung to Joanna with both hands. Slowly, but steadily, step by step she drew him upwards.

Fortunately, his room was near at hand, with the help of the gray haired butler, who answered Joanna's ring, his employer was comfortably placed in bed.

"That will do, Jones, I'm not dead yet," to the butler, who, in his consternation at the sight of his employer's helplessness had asked if there would be any command for him. "You do just as doctor Jo tells you, that's all."

"Here," calling him back, "you might bring me the papers from the library."

Joanna met him outside the door. "Could you arrange to sleep in the next room, just to be within call?" The butler promised doubtfully. Joanna assured him that it was not a necessity only a precaution, "I am not expecting a recurrence of the attack, but it is well to have some one within reach."

She read the papers, chiefly the stock market, to the financier as long as she deemed it advisable.

"Do you think it is going to be a bear market?" he asked jocosely, as she laid the paper aside.

"Yes, I think it will be bare of everything but dollars."

Hogden senior grinned.

"You women like to spend money, don't you?"

"I have sometimes thought we liked it better than anything else in the world."

This time he laughed aloud, Joanna was proving a rare avis, she entertained him, and she possessed a knowledge that enabled her to subdue his pain.

He called her back as she was leaving the room; "Don't tell my wife," he said in a hoarse voice, "she took my son away from me, and she will take you, don't tell her."

Outside in the hall Joanna clenched her hands, and, what her father had called "her fighting blood," stained her cheeks.

"Shameful! horrible! Tell her! no, I shall glory in such deceit!"

CHAPTER XX

Forgiveness

"Hogden grows old," said a broker to his fellow. Hogden, hearing the words, smiled grimly. He fought the steady advance of the years, as he had fought for the accumulation of wealth grimly determinedly. His increasing physical weakness irritated him, and he tried to spur his exhausted energies. Long had he ignored mercy and he was unmerciful to himself. But wearied nerve and muscle refused to respond to the domineering will.

The first night he spent alone in his library, brought Herbert Hogden face to face with the unalterable fact, that all men must die, that old age follows in the wake of youth, as inexorably, as night follows day. He thought of his disowned son, the son he had hoped would be a prop to his declining years, with keenest anguish.

Between his paroxysms of pain, he promised himself, he would undo the past, if possible. Feebleness and lassitude followed the attack, it was several days before he was able to return to active business again. Meanwhile it had accumulated and, from force of habit, he threw himself into the thick of the fight.

Warnings were repeated at intervals, and his old dominant spirit, began to give place to timorousness. The handwriting on the wall—"fool! this night thy

soul shall be required of thee," came to him vividly at times.

He would not seek medical advice for fear of learning the truth of his suspicions. Then the coming of Joanna changed everything. Herbert Hogden didn't believe in miracles. He had believed in nothing but his own power, but just as that seemed slipping from his grasp, Joanna had placed him on his feet again, with the reins once more in his hands. Nothing could have more quickly convinced him the miraculous really existed, and he clung to her with a feeling of an Indian for his fetish.

He declared she had cured him, and when the admonishing pain was absent he chose to close his eyes to all thought of danger. To think of life was pleasanter than to think of death, then why think of it until one must?

He secretly delighted to talk about his son, though he seldom was the first to mention his name, and when he did it was always in an impersonal way. Joanna, understanding his unuttered longing for his son, spoke often of Richard Hogden. She told him of the latter's exploits in the slum districts.

"It is quite wonderful—his hold on the people. They entreat him to hold their hands as they sink into the ether sleep. And I have seen him with cripples clinging to the skirts of his coat, asking if he was the man who cured all things."

"Hm," said Hogden senior.

She told him of the esteem of the medical world for Richard Hogden. To this Hogden senior made a characteristic reply:

"You think he is getting on in the world, then—learning the value of money?"

"I don't know about the money, life has been made brighter for many people, and people are more valuable than money, are they not?"

But Hogden senior had an extreme distaste for moralizing. Joanna's words would come to him sometimes in the silences of the night, with startling clearness. In his soul, Herbert Hogden sometimes rebelled, though less and less often; he knew he was slowly being forced to see things from a different view point. Since the night Joanna had lifted him up the stairs, he had felt a dependance upon her at once childlike and helpless.

Yet he rebelled at being thus summarily checked by weakness of body. Fortunes were slipping through his fingers. For one brief moment, he cherished the idea that Joanna would fill the place he had once fondly hoped his son would fill. But Joanna hated business; "her only business ability," she said, "was that of spending money."

"But," wishfully, "if you would see doctor Hogden—he could help you more than I. Perhaps you would like to read this letter from him?"

Hogden senior took the letter and turned it over in his hands, but apparently had no idea of reading it; it occurred to Joanna that her presence stood in his way, and she quietly withdrew. The letter was never returned nor was there mention made of it.

Encouraged, she proffered others, these likewise were received in silence and never returned. Joanna sometimes wondered what had been their fate, she was not sure he read them but they were never refused. It became so much a habit, she frequently announced their arrival, "another letter from Dr. Hogden."

She never told Hogden of the ultimate end of his letters, the reason why she hardly knew—and she wrote frequently, saying to herself, “it was for his father’s sake.” And Hogden as promptly answered.

Herbert Hogden’s manner toward his wife, reminded Joanna of the small boy’s attitude towards his teacher, he was constantly on the watch for opportunities to outwit her, and Joanna exulted whenever he succeeded in doing it. She tried one day to arouse Mrs. Hogden to her husband’s danger.

“Nonsense, Miss Lester, you nurses are such unreasonable creatures. My husband has never had an illness in his life.”

“Mr. Hogden is an old man, and lacks the resilience of youth.”

“Yes, he is old, nearly ten years older than I. I had lived abroad much of the time, but that winter papa insisted that I remain at home. If I had remained in Paris.” Mrs. Hogden sighed and added with a sentimental air, “oh, those were happy days.”

“I fear Mr. Hogden has a diseased heart, a lesion,” ventured Joanna, once more.

“Really, Miss Lester, in the present state of my own health, it is not judicious to burden me with what I cannot help. Why does he not go to a doctor?”

“I have urged him to do so, and I thought your influence——”

“It would make no difference. He was always selfwilled. I cannot take the responsibility—I am not well, and it is so exhausting to try to persuade him against his will. I really think, Miss Lester, knowing the state of my health, you should not have spoken.”

Joanna made no further attempt to enlist Mrs. Hogden's aid, but she wrote to Richard Hogden.

He replied at once; "If she thought best he would come without his father's invitation."

Hogden senior was immersed in business and declared himself well, better than he had been for a long time.

Joanna waited, feeling the time inopportune and that an attempt at reconciliation then, would be doomed to failure, and there was no time to lose. She could not rid herself of the fear, even though Hogden had written that there seemed no immediate danger. She felt sure he would think differently if he could see his father.

"I have a letter from my niece, Harriet Lovell," Mrs. Hogden announced one morning, "I want to see her, but she seldom visits me; my husband is so opposed to it. He seems to hold her responsible for the downfall of his hopes, she a Poindexter."

"Haven't you forgotten that?" said a voice from the door, and Mrs. Hunter came breezily into the room.

"No, why should I forget it?" replied Mrs. Hogden stiffly. Elizabeth Hunter was always so bourgeois.

"Well, I won't quarrel with you, Pamela."

"I never quarrel."

"But you let other people do their share, don't you?" and Mrs. Hunter's eyes twinkled.

"I suppose that was meant to be funny, but I never could appreciate your jokes. I never let anyone quarrel with me if I can help it, if that is what you mean?"

"I am glad to hear it, for I have come for Joanna."

"You mean my nurse, Miss Lester?"

"I mean Joanna Lester, if you are fortunate enough to have her in that capacity you are to be envied. She really doesn't know—Joanna, you sly minx."

"Doesn't know what? What are you talking about?" Mrs. Hogden was beginning to feel irritated.

"My dear Pamela, Joanna Lester is a genius, she is also of a very erratic mind and attempts to bring all people to the same level by placing talent and wealth at the service of the poor, hence she assumes the role of nurse."

"But I am not an object of charity!"

"Certainly not," laughed Mrs. Hunter, "but let me finish, please. She was the bright particular star in the musical world—then she suddenly disappeared. Is it possible you don't remember Joanna Lester who turned all our heads last season?"

"Oh, I remember her, of course," looking at Joanna much as the duck whose changeling had become a swan, "but it is hardly kind of you Elizabeth Hunter to keep me in ignorance. I should have been told, one hardly expects to find a prima donna in the garb of a nurse."

"There is where you lose and I win—I did expect it."

"What do you mean? She is my nurse."

"And my prima donna."

"But really, it seems to me you are carrying things with a high hand."

"You can get another nurse, I can't get a singer; besides you have no business to have a nurse who is needed for higher things."

"Who told me of her? But that is like you, Elizabeth Hunter, you always took what you wanted."

"Peace, woman, peace! She will return after she has sung to us, if she should so choose. Her fame has found her out, that is all."

Inside the limousine Mrs. Hunter indulged in laughter.

"I wouldn't have missed it for thousands, she was ready to annihilate me and she was utterly helpless. I think, Pamela Hogden, the scales are beginning to swing even. Why don't you laugh, Joanna Lester, you are not going to say you hate to leave that woman?"

"No," returned Joanna smiling, "I cannot truthfully say that. It is of her husband I am thinking, he is really ill."

"True, I had forgotten him in my joy at having beaten Pamela. Suppose we call at his office and bring him home. I own I am curious—it is a long time since we have met."

The ruler of Wall Street was surprised but he was also glad. His own car had been sent with a messenger and he was tired, so tired one of his friends helped him into the limousine.

"I'm glad you came, I've had a fatiguing day."

"And still you waste—waste Herbert Hogden, waste life for material things?"

"Hm," his eye wandering over the limousine, "cars like this are not given away, somebody must have wasted life for material things."

To his surprise, the sudden tears dimmed the bright hardness of Mrs. Hunter's eyes.

"That was a cruel stab, but I owed you one, we

are both guilty, you and I, we have these things," including the car with a wave of the hand, "but what of the price we have paid?"

Herbert Hogden's face had grown gray and grim, his shaggy brows knotted in a frown.

"Ah, these things which have cost us so much! But there is a way, they will serve us yet."

Then with a change of manner; "The sentence has been pronounced, and the court adjourned, you are free now to work more deviltry or to win a fortune."

Herbert Hogden's face relaxed in a grim smile.

"Do you know this woman, Dr. Jo? She is remarkable, quite remarkable. I knew her once long ago. I think," meditatively, "she would have made a brilliant preacher if they never discovered that she didn't practice what she preached."

"Of whom did I learn hypocrisy? Whom but a long haired youth who claimed the thesis prize, averring it was signed Hogden instead of Hunter."

"And it was, his handwriting improved after that; it was a good lesson."

"Do you remember Professor Goodman's charge, when he learned of your ambition to rule in Wall Street?"

Herbert Hogden chuckled; "He charged me, to hold fast to that which is good, and that is just what I have done."

"The letter and not the spirit of the command you obeyed. Oh, you show smudges of color as well as myself. We haven't got thus far on our journey without showing marks of various little disturbances along the way."

"She is a good talker, doctor Jo, a mighty good

talker, but, like most women she deals with imagination and not with facts."

"I protest, I have dealt in stocks, but they were not watered."

"What were you?"

"Oh, I was a lamb, sportive and innocent, I gamboled for a day and all was over."

The financier's face had lost its grimness; "Why didn't you come to me? Women always lose when they begin to gamble in stock."

"And why, prithee, should a woman not gamble in stocks?"

"Because she is a woman."

"Which is no reason at all but only passes as such among the sterner sex."

"I believe custom awards the last word to the ladies," said Hogden senior as the car stopped.

There was something forlorn in his attitude, standing alone at the door of the mansion which gave such evidence of the wealth he had striven to gain, a bent old man, the weight of his power, as it were, had crushed him.

Something of this thought was in the minds of both ladies. Mrs. Hunter, leaned forward, "I'll bring her back soon—very soon."

"Yes, bring her back, we want her."

"I am glad we went to see him," said Mrs. Hunter, slowly, "I don't feel any bitterness toward him now."

CHAPTER XXI

A Reconciliation

Herbert Hogden was aware that he was unusually tired, and he meant to heed Joanna's advice and remain away from his office, for the remainder of the day. But old habits were strong and business was urgent.

He went home late that night but exultant; his coffers were fuller by a golden stream.

An admonitory stab of pain left him grave and grim. A longing for his son took possession of him, why had he waited? Words Joanna had spoken came to him, "Yes, let him finish his work before it was too late." Herbert Hogden attempted to rise from his chair but the pain gave him a fierce twinge, he sank back and waited. His brain acted clearly without effort, the benumbing weakness was gone. Recalling Joanna's oft repeated injunction, he sat still and let his muscles relax. After a little, he slowly and carefully arose. The pain had ceased, he made his way to his desk and unlocked an inner drawer, taking from thence a folded paper.

Without haste, but steadily, quietly, he wrote. The pain awoke and stabbed him again, but he did not heed it. The letter was finished and sealed, he leaned back in his chair, his face was rigid with pain, which, every moment, was growing more insistent. Had it come?

His son's pictured face looked at him from his desk, again he felt the longing for love and human companionship, which lies in every human heart when it faces the unknown. "If he had love to go with him, love."

He sat up and, once more, opened the drawer, taking out a small box, he essayed to open it, but his strength was not equal to the task. Holding it with both hands, he bowed his head upon it, and thus he sat when Jones the butler, came to look for him in the morning.

The world, or the Wall Street part of it was greatly shocked when it read the morning papers. Rumors were rife; some declared the ruler of Wall Street had met with severe losses; others that his health had been steadily failing; still others that his colossal fortune had crumbled and he was well-nigh penniless.

The obituary notice was lengthy. Most of his life had been spent on 'change; his had been a remarkably career. Of great business ability, few like him in the business world.

Regret was expressed that the son was not likely to take his father's place. Who would arise and take up the scepter dropped from his nerveless hand? And what would become of the supposed colossal fortune? were queries raised but left unanswered.

Richard Hogden read the papers on the way to his father's house. He had been absent when his father's death occurred, and was making all possible haste home in response to a telegram.

In his pocket was a brief note from Joanna; full of regret and sorrow; yet breathing forth courage.

How well she understood his feelings, and how bravely she had poured strength in his soul. A dry heat filled his veins, was she trying to comfort *him*? Or was he but an atom in the world of sorrow, she had set her soul to conquer?

Sad as he was, the thought that Joanna understood and was beginning to return his love, sent a throb of exultation through his whole being. He had been grateful to her—deeply grateful—for her courage in assuming and sustaining her role in his father's house. He felt sure her effort had not been without result though it might not be all she desired.

For the rest he was not unprepared; he had felt his father's condition to be serious from the first. With Joanna's help he had done the best he could. If it could have been otherwise.

Hogden aroused himself, impatiently; it was worse than useless to dwell on that which could not be helped.

It had been a long time since he had ascended those steps. He was met by the old butler and deferentially directed to his mother's room. Richard had not thought how he should meet his mother. Under the burden of this common sorrow, there seemed no room for anything else.

Mrs. Hogden turned querulously, as he entered the room and stopped aghast.

"It is Richard, mother," advancing and holding out his hand. Mrs. Hogden allowed him to lead her to a sofa and seat himself by her side.

"This is hard for you, mother, is there anything I can do?"

A young woman now came forward, who had hitherto escaped his notice.

"This is Miss Lovell, my niece," said his mother, with some emphasis, of which he was only half aware, thinking vaguely it was his mother's way.

To Miss Lovell, he said, "he was glad to know his mother's friends and to know that she had not been alone at this of all sad times." This little ceremony ended, he reseated himself by his mother's side.

"Is there anything I can do, mother, any arrangements to make, or things of that sort?"

"No, I believe not, Harriet has helped me, I don't know what I should have done without her."

His mother might not have intended to remind him of his delinquency, but this was hardly what he had expected. He felt very uncomfortable, his old home received him not—he was a stranger.

He said, "he was glad his mother had such an efficient helper," and arose to go.

"The funeral is set for Wednesday?" he asked gently, "shall I come?"

"Why, of course, you have created comment enough, let us not be a target for any more. Sit down! Why do you go now?"

"I am very busy, mother, if you do not need me, I must go."

"I hoped, Richard, you would come home, now, and behave like a gentleman."

"I'll come whenever you need me, but a doctor, you know, has many lives in his hands."

"You weary me, why will you persist in such a course?"

"I don't think I quite understand, mother," said Hogden gently.

"Now, that there is no need of your living in the

social rank you do, why will you not come home and live in a way befitting a Poindexter? Frankly, we feel it to be a disgrace that you should follow such pursuits. If they are not low in themselves you are thrown among undesirable people, and you become socially a nobody."

"We won't consider that now, mother. Remember I am ready to help you in any way, if I am needed."

"You are like your father, I verily believe," cried Mrs. Hogden in a vexed tone, "I never knew him when he wasn't in a hurry, he never could learn to live like a gentleman. In his last moments he thought of his money box and they had to take it out of his hands by force."

His mother's words jarred on Hogden:

"Well, good-bye, mother, if you want me I'll come."

"I don't know that there will be anything; I have employed Davis."

"Why employ him?" interrupted Hogden quickly, "he is a noted rascal. Carter and Pond were father's lawyers and understand his business better than any other."

"I cannot endure him, he bores me to extinction."

He knew of old that argument only increased his mother's opposition;

"Well, good-bye, once more, I hope you will have no trouble."

"Wait, Richard, I think you ought to know who Harriet is—you may have something to say to her."

Hogden looked at Miss Lovell, mistified.

"I think," said that young woman, in a deprecatory manner, "that aunt Pamela forgets the lapse of time."

"No, I don't," snapped Mrs. Hogden, Richard owes you an apology."

Then Hogden knew to whom he was talking. He was both hurt and annoyed.

Miss Lovell, noting his expression, came forward with extended hand, saying graciously, "you owe me nothing."

"Thank you," said Hogden wondering why, in spite of her graciousness, that he did not like her face. It was a trick of the eyes and mouth he thought that impressed him disagreeably.

"I wish to let bygones be bygones, and I am glad to make your acquaintance. Shall I go down with you?"

"Thanks, no." Her reference to the past seemed dreadfully out of place just then.

"Good-bye then, you will find him in the drawing room."

Again Hogden felt annoyed, he wished they wouldn't speak of his father as "it" and "him."

In the stately drawing room, a room which he had particularly hated, lay all that was mortal of Herbert Hogden. Hogden approached reverently and looked upon his father's face. Death had beautified it. He looked younger, looked as the master of Wall Street might have looked, in that long ago time, before the greed of gold was on him. Hogden thought this as he stood by his side looking down. He was conscious of a vague regret, as he stood there, a longing to know his father as he might have been. With a stifled sigh he turned away and paced slowly up and down the room.

It was a sad home coming, his mother yet thought of him as one who had frustrated her plans, and his

father was beyond his reach. If he could know that Joanna was right and his father cared.

A box on the table caught his eye, he thought of the box of which his mother had spoken, mechanically he went to the table and took it in his hands.

It was not large, of some variety of scented wood, on the cover was an inlaid rose. It was locked and the key was missing. He took it to the library, and found many keys but none fitted, at last, in the inner drawer of the desk, he found a little key, rusty with age, this after a few trials turned in the lock. The box was empty, or nearly so, he carried it to the window for a stronger light.

It contained a faded picture, a sweet faced young woman, where had he seen a face like that? But search his memory as he would, he could not remember when he had seen that familiar countenance and he laid it aside. In one corner, in a faded satin case was a plain gold ring. Hogden took it in his hand. What blighted hopes, what broken vows could that golden circlet reveal, if it could speak? "From H. to N." was engraved on the inside.

His father had treasured these mementoes of the past, all his life, and in the moment of death had reached for them, his father, whom he had thought cared only for his fortune. In the bottom of the box were some letters which had a very modern look. Hogden turned them over curiously. They were directed to Miss Joanna Lester, in his own hand writing—his letters to Joanna! She had given them to his father and here they had been placed with his other treasures.

Hogden felt a sudden tightness in his throat, he laid the box down, and stood looking out of the

window with misty eyes. David Hogden had once said "Herbert's love of wealth and power will crucify the love of his heart," and he, the son, had not understood and had let his father suffer in silence.

He was glad his father had read those letters, he at least would know that his son thought of him. Did he guess how dear Joanna was to him, Richard Hogden?

His heart thrilled with profound gratitude as he thought of her. What was there in life, of worth, that she had not brought him?

He went back to his father's side and gently slipped the ring and the faded picture beneath the folds across his breast. He almost fancied that the silent face took on a smile. They had a secret in common, now, and they were nearer together than they had been for long years.

The letters he put in his pocket, some day he would give them back to Joanna and tell her what they did.

He replaced the little box in the inner drawer of his father's desk. The secret, it so long had guarded, had been taken from it, it could tell no tales. With one more look at his father's face which more than ever seemed to smile, he went out as he had gone once before, closing the door softly behind him. But this time he went with the feeling of perfect peace which follows a reconciliation.

CHAPTER XXII

Love And Intrigue

The burial of the great financier took place with considerable pomp. He had left a written request to be buried in a little suburban graveyard, but Mrs. Hogden would listen to nothing so eccentric. Her son and her husband's brother, the Reverend David Hogden pleaded eloquently that the request might be granted, but to no purpose.

"If *they* were careless of the family honor, *she* was not—a Poindexter never forgot his dignity, nor what belonged to his social position. "

It was over at last. Through all the ostentatious ceremony, Richard Hogden moved with saddened heart, feeling that this throng of people had never really known his father.

They had known the financier, and were drawn thither by that feeling which most people involuntarily give to wealth. It hurt him, because he knew the judgment they were passing upon him who, lay lifeless before them, yet how could they have reached a different decision—had not his own son so judged him?

As far as it lay in his power, he would reveal the better man, the man who had been so overshadowed by the financier. Richard Hogden said this to himself looking down upon his father's face for the last time.

She had made this moment easier for him—his father's "doctor Jo" there was no defeat, it was victory.

"Come and see us, Richard, won't you?" asked Mrs. Hunter, hurriedly, as she passed him, "we want to see you, Joanna and I, and she sent you this," grasping his hand.

"Thank you—thank you both. Yes, I'll be glad to come, but I shall be very busy for some days."

"Well, come as soon as you can."

"I'll not forget," but it was nearly two weeks before he could avail himself of the invitation. And, greatly to his annoyance, he found several visitors present.

Joanna freed herself from the animated conversation and came forward to meet him.

"May I return this?" said Hogden, taking her hand in a warm clasp, "it helped me more than you can know."

"I have been wanting to see you," said Joanna, wondering if her face had betrayed her by a visible increase of color. "Would it be an impertinence on my part, to trouble you still further with affairs of my own?"

"Do you need to ask that?"

This time Joanna knew her face was betraying her and to cover her embarrassment, she sought relief in general conversation.

"I felt that I had no right—you are very kind. We are sorry that we are not more at liberty to-day, but these are musical geniuses and have to be entertained—a musical genius is quite a trying creature at times."

"Some of them I grant. There is one of them looking as if he would like to see me hung."

"That is Signore Luigi, he is really harmless, come, let me introduce you."

Hogden remained an hour, hoping for an opportunity to speak to Joanna alone, but none came.

She was led to the piano by Signore Luigi, who pleaded for song after song. He felt a desire to throttle the little bewhiskered foreigner, why should she sing for him? Yet under the influence of the music, he forgot his irritation. "Was he a vain fool, or was it to him she sang?"

The music ended, he arose to take his leave.

"I am so sorry it so happened," said Joanna with her wishful smile, "Mrs. Hunter has been looking for you for so long."

Hogden had endured jealous fears for an hour; this unfortunate little remark shattered his soothing fancy and brought them back in full force.

"I am sorry to disappoint—Mrs. Hunter." This was said with so much significance, Joanna caught her breath with a little gasp.

"I beg your pardon—I forgot myself—you ought to kick me out for my presumption."

Joanna recovered her self possession with an effort, but she was unable to meet his glance, and Hogden was uncertain whether the vivid color in her cheeks betokened anger or maidenly shyness.

"What an ass he had made of himself!" he thought, savagely. She seemed to have slipped away from him. Why couldn't he have defied convention and taken her in his arms then and there? Whatever she thought of him, she couldn't think worse than he did of himself."

That love is blind, is proverbial. Hogden might have rated himself with less severity, if he could

have seen Joanna's face when she entered the drawing room. No whit of its radiance escaped Mrs. Hunter's observant eyes, and that worthy lady's impatience grew apace, as their visitors delayed their departure. She could scarcely forbear interrupting Signore Luigi's lengthy adieu, in its most impassioned sentence, so eager was she to question Joanna.

She found her in her favorite low chair on the hearth rug, the Maltese cat comfortably seated on her skirts. She dropped into a chair at the opposite angle of the rug and stretched her daintly shod feet toward the fire.

"Our dapper little Signore is already on his knees, metaphorically speaking, what are you going to say to him, Joanna?"

"Wouldn't it be well to wait, his overtures are, as yet, unmade."

"Are they? Opinions differ, I suppose, what did Richard say?"

"He said, or rather, I said we were sorry to have been so occupied with other visitors."

"Was that all?"

"I think so—of importance."

Mrs. Hunter laughed, "I am forced to doubt, either your intelligence or your veracity. But I have something very important to say and I don't conceal it."

Joanna stopped stroking the cat and looked up.

"I met Pamela Hogden's niece to-day, in my travels."

"Well."

"But it isn't well, it's ill—I distrust that young woman, Joanna. She reminds me of Malta when she has been stealing cream."

Joanna stroked the cat again, smiling gently.

"You needn't smile, Joanna Lester, I don't like the look of things, there is a deep laid trap somewhere."

"I am all attention, unfold this machiavelian plot, your sagacity is a credit to your sex—unfold."

"You minx! I have a mind to shake you. Listen before you flout my judgement. I met Miss Lovell in front of Macy's, she was shopping—very ostensibly shopping, in the Hogden limousine, Pamela's own maid to carry the bundles. She said her aunt expected to spend the summer in Paris, and would leave home very early in the season and—this is the surprising part of it—Pamela was debating an invitation to you and, Miss Lovell delicately told me that she cast her influence in your favor and so it was decided. Now what is her coup d'etat?"

"Must there, of necessity, be one?"

"Of course there must. I know Pamela Hogden, who was born a Poindxeter, of old. Intrigue is as necessary as the air she breathes. Just now, I can't fathom her plot, but I shall, I defy her to deceive me. We have not had a battle since Richard left his father's house and I feel this is to be my Waterloo—I shall die of chagrin, if it ends in anything but a blaze of glory."

"You interest me, but why should I be one of the features of the play?"

"Poor innocent? You forget that Herbert Hogden left a will."

"Oh!"

"Yes, and it isn't to be read for three months. What strange whim moved Herbert Hogden, nobody knows but that is the decree and all must wait until

that length of time has elapsed. Pamela Hogden thinks all his, hers, but Miss Lovell, while affirming her uncle Herbert would of course, leave everything to her aunt, could not quite conceal from me, that she thinks differently."

"But how am I involved?"

"That is just what I am trying to find out."

Joanna leaned back in her chair with a little laugh.

"Don't you think, that in the excitement of unraveling a mystery, you have exaggerated my importance?"

"No, I don't. I spoke to Richard."

"And what does Doctor Hogden think?"

"I don't know what he thinks," cried Mrs. Hunter despairingly, "I talk and talk and am no wiser than before, but I earnestly abjure you, my dear, to refuse Pamela Hogden's invitation."

"But I haven't received it."

"You will, never fear, and now won't you sing for me. I have had such a wearisome day wrestling with the obdurate and selfish, I would be soothed by music."

When Joanna left the piano Mrs. Hunter turned toward her with a triumphant face;

"I have solved the riddle," she said.

CHAPTER XXIII

Square Pegs And Round Holes

Winter had roared itself out and, with the coming of March came puffs of balmy air from the south which left the snow dirty pools of slush, and started the slow swelling buds on bush and tree.

Spring had come with a rush.

Joanna moving slowly along the walk, stopped, to watch a family of sparrows in the throes of some domestic disagreement. But while she watched the birds her mind was subconsciously pursuing a different train of thought.

She had been very busy since returning to her musical career, so busy Mrs. Hunter declared she was looking hollowed eyed, and sent her forth for fresh air and sunshine.

"What an unfortunate thing," she was thinking, "is a misfit." The square peg that was eternally trying to get into the round hole and, of course could not. His attempts might be amusing to the onlookers, but they were anything but a laughing matter to the peg.

Her musical career, she found had lost its savor, how could she leave the great onward moving force of the current, for the stagnant pools and eddies along the shore? She wanted some one to sing to, who had suffered and endured, some one who could

understand. She loved music but she loved people more. To sing to the crushed, the burdened, the sinful, that was what she wanted; to go down into the slums where once she went with Hogden and sing. Didn't the square peg ever find the square hole?

"Joanna! Miss Lester—must I say Miss Lester?" Stephens came hurriedly up the walk on her right.

"You startled me—No, Joanna is sufficient."

"Thanks. Pardon my rudeness, I was afraid you would escape me, and I have been trying to see you."

"I regret that my work denies me my friends. I was away when you called, but Mrs. Hunter told me. I was greatly disappointed, for I have wanted to know your plans."

They walked on side by side, for some minutes, in silence, Joanna, gentle, sympathetic, Stephens, showing badly suppressed feeling.

"I know what you think of me," he suddenly burst out, "and I don't blame you, a cad, a scoundrel, are much too good for me."

"You will please not call my friends, names."

Stephens face quivered.

"I don't suppose you know just what it means to me—your calling, me a friend?"

"Lynn Stephens!" relapsing into the sisterly manner she often had in those long ago days, "how morbidly sensitive you are! You brood too much, thinking of one's failures, does no good—forget them and look to the future."

"But my failures have cost me my all—what is there left?"

"But I have asked you not to think of it."

"I know you have, Joanna, you would try to convince the leopard his hide was not spotted; the devil, that he neither had horns nor cloven feet. It is comfortable, I know, for the devil to be convinced, but there are moments when he sees clearly and realizes his delusion."

Joanna was visibly disturbed; she had never seen Stephens in quite so hopeless a mood.

"I wish, Lynn, you would try to forget such thoughts; they hinder you from reaching the best, of which you are capable—you lose heart."

"Don't I know it? I would crawl in the dust at your feet, if I could undo the past."

"Oh, Lynn!"

"I know what you would say—you have forgiven it, it is like you to forgive, but you have noted the unmistakable signs, which betray his devilish presence, and to forgive is all you can do."

"Oh, Lynn!"

"There! I won't," contritely, "I can at least, keep my groans and curses to myself."

They were nearing the terrace, Joanna paused and leaned on the wall. She had always liked the view from that particular spot but now, she was hardly conscious of what she saw. Stephens, leaning on the wall at her side, with haggard face, let his gaze follow hers. His expression gradually softened.

"Beautiful is it not? Life holds something yet for you, you have your art."

Stephens' brow darkened.

"You are a woman, Joanna, and you cannot realize how empty art for art's sake sounds to a man. He is willing to work for her, to struggle toward

perfection, but he wants two things, which really give him a reason for existence—namely, wife and home.”

“But why need you conclude so hastily that both are impossible?”

Stephens gave her a quick incredulous look.

“Don’t mistake me. The past we have blotted out, I, in truest friendship ask you to begin life anew—a new man, with new life, new hopes.”

“You mean,” said Stephens slowly, “that I add to my list of sins, by forgetting even you and find happiness in the love of some other woman? I didn’t expect that from you.”

“Oh, but you don’t understand!” In her earnestness Joanna laid her hand on his arm, “it breaks my heart to see you wishing—wishing for the things that won’t come, as a friend, desiring your happiness more than her own, I would be remembered forever, why should your life be ruined by any other thought of me?”

“Yes, I understand what you mean, but you couldn’t blame a poor devil if he didn’t voluntarily, choose the darkness after once having had the light?”

Joanna turned away despairingly. For one brief moment, Stephens was moved by an impulse to throw himself at her feet and pour forth his shame and love, in a wild hope that, through her pity, she might be won. But the pain, visible in her face, awoke the better man in him.

“I have never been any good to any one, and a cross to you.”

“Oh, Lynn, don’t say that! Would you blot out the past entirely, if you could?”

"Of course I wouldn't—you know that."

"No more would I and—I want you to promise me something," stopping their slow advance and turning towards him.

"Haven't I a right, Lynn, to ask something of you?"

"God knows you have a right to whatever you ask," said Stephens hoarsely.

"In the first place, you are to promise that you will devote your energies to art, and fulfill the hopes of long ago."

Stephens dropped his face in his hands, to conceal his emotion.

"Then you are to promise that you won't let me spoil your life—you will welcome all that makes it rich and full, do you promise, Lynn?"

"I promise," said Lynn with face averted.

They walked on in silence. It was not easy for either to return to commonplaces, after deep emotion, Stephens' face could not quite conceal his inward struggle, and Joanna, full of pity, tried to lead his thoughts to other things.

"Oh, Lynn, I have a message for you from Mrs. Hunter, I nearly forgot it. I think she means to give you an order to execute. Come up, if you can, and she will tell you about it."

Stephens, whose pulse had bounded at the thought of once more discussing art with Joanna replied briefly:

"I'll come if I can but I shall be very busy? Shall we say Wednesday?"

"She expects Dr. Hogden on that day, and I think she would prefer to give her whole time to you, when you come. She will be unoccupied Thursday if you could make it convenient."

Stephens assented.

"So Hogden goes there, does he?"

Stephens had never thought to be jealous of Hogden; he was emphatically not a ladies' man, but the thought that he was a visitor at Mrs. Hunter's irritated him.

"Is he there often?"

"Not very often. You won't forget that we shall look for you on Thursday?"

"No, I won't forget."

Joanna was both glad and sorry when the walk came to an end. She had a feeling, that her self control was not to be trusted; yet to leave Stephens in his present state of calm helplessness, cost her a pang.

"I am glad I met you this morning, and—we are friends—it is all right now?"

"We are friends—it is all right now."

Turning, she made a little gesture of farewell. Stephens lifted his hat. He watched her till she was out of sight.

He had been making up his mind that he would not see Joanna again, if he could help it. Since he had lost her, she had grown unspeakably dearer.

"He would take this trip up north, he would devote himself to art, he would fulfill his promise, and then—God help him."

"You are late," said Mrs. Hunter, as Joanna entered. "Why, what is the matter?"

Joanna smiled through her tears into that astonished lady's face.

"Won't the square peg ever get into the square hole, where it belongs?" she queried.

CHAPTER XXIV

As Woman Wills

Time hurried on merrily. The longing to see Joanna almost took Stephens to Mrs. Hunter's—almost but not quite.

He was very busy, making ready for his departure, and that helped him to keep his resolution not to see her before he left.

The White Wing, coast trade steamer, was billed to sail the fifteenth, Stephens drew a pencil through that date on the calendar, and then dreaded to see the advance of time.

His rooms were to be given up and his furniture stored. He thought while engaged in dismantling his studio, that he was being pulled up by the roots. Once he would have welcomed a new venture, now he seemed like a bark unloosed from its moorings, unchartered and without a pilot. Once he had sacrificed everything—love—honor—for art, now he pursued her clinging helplessly to the faith of one woman. She had heaped coals of fire on his head, yet in her greatness of spirit she prevented their burning.

His latest work "Queen of Roses," begun so long before and still unfinished, he removed regretfully from the easel. He wanted to take it with him, but knew it would be to no purpose. How many things he had promised himself he would do, and this was

the greatest of them all—this couldn't fail, his life was in it.

He had been untrue to art, untrue to himself, untrue to love. It was no easy task to build anew from the ruins, but that was what lay before him. She had no faith in his word, he knew, though she had not said it. He didn't blame her, but she didn't know how deep was the wound.

Some women wouldn't have cared—they were the kind he had known and he had grown to think it didn't matter. Hers had been a higher level and she wouldn't believe he could attain to it. She was the soul of gentle knidness, but that was not what he wanted. He wanted her love, wanted her belief in his honor, and he had neither.

Stephens took his hat and coat from the rack, as he put them on he looked about the room. His baggage was already aboard the White Wing, everything was packed for removal. As he turned the key in the lock for the last time, he was conscious of a pang.

"What a timorous old woman I am," he muttered, but his ironical utterance did not restore his spirits. It was in a very gloomy mood, that he joined Bruyere at the restaurant.

"I have been waiting for you, for an hour," said the latter rising and making his way to a table. "If there is anything that makes a man aware of flaws in his disposition, it is waiting when he is hungry."

Stephens followed without speaking.

"Anything gone wrong?" asked Bruyere, catching sight of his face.

"Nothing new: It began when I was born. I seem to be one of those unlucky devils, who never can find out just why they were born."

"Man, what has come over you? You were in pursuit of an artist's Utopia yesterday?"

"Oh, it's all right. I am glad to go, of course, but it's rather hard to tear one's self from the old moorings."

"You'll get used to that," was the confident reply, "That reminds me, a fellow, your doctor at the hospital—what is his name?"

"Hogden?"

"Yes, that's it—asked me to say to you, that he should accompany the ladies to the steamer to see you off. He didn't say who the ladies were, but I suppose you know."

"Yes, I know," said Stephens, and his spirits brightened.

"Pretty good sort, that Hogden."

"Yes, but slow," Stephens stopped—another twinge—Joanna trusted Hogden—he trusted him, himself.

Here the conversation flagged somewhat, and Bruyere gave emphasis to the assertion that he was hungry.

"I really wish I were going too," putting down an empty coffee cup.

"I am sure I wish you were."

"It is the only way to succeed, but then I couldn't now," evasively.

Stephens did not press him for his reasons.

"Well, so long," said Bruyere rising at last, at the end of a desultory conversation. Come back famous.

Stephens made a wry face.

"And if I come back as confoundly down and out, as I am now, you will cut my acquaintance, I suppose?"

"Oh, not as bad as that," laughed Bruyere, he came back and stood for a moment, awkwardly, looking down upon the table.

"I wanted to tell you before you went away, that Ju—Miss Lendenning has promised to marry me."

"Why Eugene, that is good news—I congratulate you with all my heart." And Stephens arose and shook him warmly by the hand. "Let me know when the happy event takes place."

"Oh, that isn't settled yet—would be glad to have you here, only I don't like to put off a wedding."

"Of course not—don't do it, I wish you happiness, Eugene, you are a good fellow and you deserve it."

The two shook hands again, Stephens resumed his seat at the table, while Bruyere left the room.

A boy entered and went to the desk to make some inquiry, and then crossed the room to where Stephens was sitting, lost in thought.

"She said I was to wait for an answer," he said, handing Stephens a note.

Stephens frowned, he recognized that flowing but not legible hand. "Tell her I'll come," he said, not very graciously.

The boy departed and Stephens looked at his watch, he would have but little time to spare; he could linger no longer over his supper, and, lighting a cigar, he left the room.

Julia Lendenning occupied a flat, second floor, front, Stephens entered the hall, ran up the stairs and knocked at her door. He could not conceive why she had sent for him. They had parted in anger but she had sent him a beseeching little note, imploring forgiveness, and he had answered briefly, but not unkindly. What could she want of him now? Did she wish to tell him of her engagement?

Getting no reply to his knock he tried the door, it was unlocked and he entered. The room would have been in total darkness, but for the narrow opening between the curtains which were hung across the room. Greatly wondering, he went up to the opening and looked within. His amazed glance rested on a fairyland of light and shadow, flowers and shrubs, his artist's soul was at once awake.

"Are you there?" he asked.

"Oh, is that you, Lynn?" from behind a flower screen, came Julia Lendenning's voice, "in just a moment—I haven't quite completed my toilet."

Stephens waited in considerable curiosity, until she stepped into view, in white flowing robes, and executed a graceful dance, cunningly placed mirrors reflected the dancer till the garden vista, on which he gazed, seemed full of the graceful moving figures. Dance followed dance to the accompanying strains of the hidden musicians. In her limited field Julia Lendenning had something of the artist's genius, the effect was very beautiful. Stephens watched, breathless with admiration, till he suddenly bethought himself of the flight of time.

"I must go," he said.

"Oh, not yet, it isn't late, I have one thing more, it is the best of all."

He seated himself to wait. It took her a long time to arrange, her toilet, Stephens called impatiently.

"Yes, yes, I'm coming, it isn't late," but it was several minutes before she appeared.

Stephens caught his breath as she advanced, slowly keeping perfect time with the music. He forgot the White Wing, forgot everything but that

graceful moving figure. Against a dark back ground Julia Lendenning stood revealed with the clearness of a cameo. She was clad in some gauzy white material with silver spangles. It hung straight and full from the shoulders, but so thin the outlines of her figure, of which she was so proud, were distinctly revealed. The light, which was centered upon her, was in turn a clear white light; a radiant rose, a soft blue.

She went slowly through the graceful poses of a dance. Stephens watched her, intoxicated by her sensuous beauty. She came slowly toward him, advancing, then retreating as if overcome by shyness, again to advance as if drawn by some irresistible force. Nearer—nearer she came, he noted her gentle pant, his own breath was coming quickly. A whirl, a drooping hesitating pose, and the beautiful vision was in his arms, her arms about his neck.

"You won't go Lynn—you won't go—I cannot let you go," she breathed.

The words gave him a cruel start. It was like the rending of a curtain revealing the reality, ugly and bare.

"But Bruyere—you are engaged to Bruyere," he cried forcibly dragging her arms away.

"Oh, but it was a mistake, a cruel mistake," she gasped, "Lynn, if you would listen," seeking to detain him.

"He just told me of it, he believes you—you are the devil!"

The striking of the clock as he left the house, filled him with despair and he ran several blocks before recollecting himself and hailing a taxi.

Stephens had not been a praying man, his lips,

now, were mute, but in his heart he was praying frantically that the steamer had been delayed. He was out of the taxi almost before it stopped.

"Steamer has been gone half an hour, sir," said a by-standing policeman.

Stephens stopped as if stunned, walked aimlessly forward and sat down on a pile of merchandise. The wind swept in, raw and cold, from the Atlantic, but he did not heed it.

Joanna had come—he knew she would not fail—she had come to bid him 'God speed,' and where was he!—wasting his glorious opportunity for what?

He had vowed he would make himself fit to be judged by her standard, and how easily he had been duped. If she had not believed him before, how could she believe him now? With a groan he got up and walked aimlessly about. What a fool! What a damn fool he had been! all—all that made life worth living—gone for a look at that woman's devilish beauty!

Hot hatred filled his heart. "Engaged to Bruyere?" and Stephens laughed aloud, a horrid laugh. Well, such women, evidently lived, more was the pity, and curses trembled on his tongue, but he did not utter them, instead he threw himself prone on the ground and buried his face in his arms.

How long he lay there in bitter self abasement, he did not know, he was aroused by a touch on his shoulder.

"Get out!" he said roughly, "I'm not drunk."

"That's where the wind sits, is it?" said the policeman. "Well, you must get up."

"Oh, let me alone, can't you?" Stephens raised his head, "I'm neither drunk nor crazy."

"But it's my business to take charge of you."

"Your business may go to the devil."

"See here, my good fellow," said the officer who was tinctured with the milk of human kindness, "you will be frozen stiff before morning! the wind has changed and the weather bureau says there's a blizzard coming."

"So much the better, I would jump into the Atlantic if I wasn't a damn coward."

"Down on your luck?" asked the policeman, laying a silver dollar on Stephens' knee, who had arisen, and sat on the pile of junk, beside him.

"I don't want your money," curtly.

"Oh, all right," said the guardian of the public, slipping it easily back into his pocket, but you had better go home."

"I haven't any."

The officer looked at him keenly. In the language of the street, he was "a sure enough gentleman" and he was not drunk.

"Well, I can't leave you here, there's a lodging house near by, not very fancy but respectable and all right."

Stephens offered no protest, he was shaking in every limb and his teeth chattered violently. He didn't care what they did with him if they took him where it was warm.

"I've brought you a man, Mother Mollie," said the officer to the large, motherly looking woman, who filled the doorway of the shabby little parlor. Stephens had dropped weakly into a chair, grateful for the meagre warmth of the small stove.

"And where shall I put him, thin, and ivery bed in the house, that full?"

"I don't care where you put me, if it is warm," chattered Stephens.

After a little delay Mrs. McGaffey decided to put the "strange gentleman" in her own bed, "sure I can slape wid the children, one at the foot and one at the head and we'll get along nicely."

"I've no doubt you will, Mis' McGaffey, I'll leave him with you."

Stephens meekly followed his landlady's directions. She lamented sorely that her house could not boast of a hot water bottle, but she placed hot bricks at his feet, drew the flannel blanket over his neck; "Ye'll hear me outside in the mornin', but ye's needn't get up till ye's a moind."

Stephens murmured his thanks through chattering teeth. The chill was followed by fever and he tossed restlessly for hours muttering imprecation on the idiot who supposed a man could sleep in a band box. He did not arise in the morning, Mrs. McGaffey, bringing in his breakfast was met by a stupid stare.

In the afternoon the fever returned. It loosened his tongue and his ravings increased in violence, with the increase of fever. In distress, Mrs. McGaffey sought, Duffey, the policeman.

"Sure, I don't know what to do wid him at all. I same to be somebody else, and he tells me to go to the devil—it's not there I would be goin'. It's the doctor he nades—the big doctor at the horsepittle."

"Hogden?"

"He's the man, bliss him!"

"But, Mother Mollie, you wouldn't expect the best man on the job to come this way?"

"Indade I would thin. Didn't he cure me Jimmy,

"But it's my business to take charge of you."

"Your business may go to the devil."

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"And where shall I put him, thin, and ivery bed in the house, that full?"

know me, I hardly think he would know you. Everything is being done that can be, may I ask you to wait until you hear from me again?"

R. Hogden."

CHAPTER XXV

Life and Death

Stephens grew steadily worse; the third day Hogden went to see Joanna.

"You may help him, and you may not," he said, "but there is a chance."

"I should have gone before—you should not have spared me."

"It would have caused you unnecessary pain, and to no purpose."

"Is pain ever necessary?"

"You know it is."

Joanna felt a rebellious impulse. Raising her eyes, Hogden's glance was quickly averted; she was conscious of an unexpected thrill and then her conscience pricked her, how could she think of happiness when another suffered?

"Have you any idea how this came about?" she asked presently.

"I have an idea, but it is little more than that. I gathered from his rambling talk, that he was detained on his way and missed the boat, in his disappointment, he forgot necessary precautions and lingered on the dock in the teeth of a biting wind. In his condition, it was extremely dangerous."

Stephens seemed unconscious of Joanna's presence, as she bent over him. He was muttering hoarsely, "failed—again—failed."

"Oh" cried Joanna, turning to Hogden, "I understand what you meant, now!"

"Try not to mind it," taking her hand, as Stephens' reiteration made her quiver, "I cannot allow you to remain if——"

"Oh, but you will?" in her fear she took the hand which held hers in both her own. Hogden gently released himself and turned away, he thought he had endured all flesh and blood could, without an outburst.

"What do you think?" asked Joanna, following him to the door. He was putting on his coat, and didn't answer for a minute, he was wondering just how much she cared for that man on the bed.

"Can you bear the worst?"

"Yes, but her hands involuntarily grasped each other.

"I don't know," hesitatingly, "he may go soon, if there is no change, but there is a chance that he will rally,—I will come again before night."

Joanna still hesitated before him. Hogden picked up his medicine case.

"Do you think he did not want to make this trip he had planned?"

Hogden came close to her side. "Don't worry about that, Miss Lester, he talked with me about it, with every appearance of pleasure, you need take no blame upon yourself, thinking you had urged him to the performance of an unwelcomed task. I feel sure that his only regret is that he did not perform it. You know him better than I, you must have noticed a certain dilatory habit. His ravings have told me that he really intended to reach the steamer, but in his usual fashion, he thought he had time enough.

"Thank you," replied Joanna softly. Hogden opened the door and went out.

"Did she love that man?"

Stephens showed a slight improvement, on his return, that night. Was it owing to Joanna's presence? Hogden did not know, her glance, full of gratitude to him, disclaimed any part she might have had in it, it also dulled the gnawing pangs of jealousy.

"Ther is a strange lyddy in the parlor askin' for the sick gintleman," said Mrs. McGaffey from the doorway.

Hogden's glance met Joanna's; "I will go down," he said, he had a premonition of coming evil, and he felt powerless to shield her whom he loved.

Miss Lendenning stood waiting, "You are the attending physician?"

"Lynn Stephens, the artist is here?" Hogden nodded.

"He can be removed to my rooms, he would be more comfortable there."

"He is too sick a man to be moved, if not, he would have been taken to the hospital before this."

"I wish to see him."

Hogden looked at her a moment; "You will remember," he said with emphasis, "that he is a very sick man,—a weak heart, a little excitement might be fatal."

"Yes, yes," was the impatient reply, "I understand all that."

"I am afraid you do not. He cannot live more than twenty-four hours at the most. His mind has been terribly burdened, but he is more quiet now, unless you know the secret of his trouble and can relieve it, you had best not see him."

Miss Lendenning's glance fell, she seemed to be contemplating the toe of her patent leather boot, which was thrust forward as if inviting attention. This was a type of man she had never met, to see Stephens, she was determined, but how?

"I think I understand what you mean," she said, raising her eyes, "and if I can see him, I think I can quiet him."

"You can try, but remember what I have said—excitement is fatal."

Perhaps she had meant all she had promised, but the sight of Joanna—her hated rival, lashed her into a frenzy of jealousy. Hogden laid a restraining hand on her arm as she was rushing forward. The look on Stephens' face caught his watchful eye and leaving Miss Lendenning a few paces behind, he stepped forward and laid his finger on the sick man's pulse.

Jealousy is a strong passion, in its grasp, reason, honor, love, everything goes, but the satisfaction of its mad desire. Miss Lendenning knelt by the bedside, and seizing Stephens by the hand began calling to him in words of endearment. Stephens' expression became one of pain and terror, raising his free hand, as if in supplication, he uttered the one word "lost"—But before he had uttered it, Hogden led Miss Lendenning forcibly from the room, coolly locking the door in her very face.

Never had the young woman been so angry, there was that in Hogden's manner which added to her fury, he had withdrawn his hand from her arm—cast her forth like an unclean thing. She—Julia Lendenning—who could play with men's hearts and men's wills like paper dolls! He should repent of this indignity—yes, bitterly repent!"

Like a beautiful fury she stood, with angry eyes fixed on that closed door; so might have stood Eve, from the gates of Paradise thrust out. The closing of a door below turned her gaze in that direction—Bruyere was ascending the stairs.

"Eugene! oh Eugene!"

He started and looked up. His expression was that of a man waking in his sleep, his eyes betrayed many wakeful hours. He looked at her as though she was not real, but some phantom of his own imagination. His glance fell and he continued the ascent.

"Eugene, he has insulted me!—the man in there."

But Bruyere passed her with averted face. He rapped at the door of the sick room and was admitted.

Miss Lendenning was stunned, anger and jealousy she had known, but never this—did they think she would tamely submit to be thus ignored? Bruyere had asked her to marry him—he should feel the full weight of her displeasure when he came forth. With the majesty of an injured queen she descended the stairs.

She had not long to wait, Bruyere soon appeared. His face revealed deep emotion; apparently without seeing her, he was about to move on, when she seized his arm.

"Eugene! What do you mean? Such treatment is downright insult—explain yourself."

Thus summarily halted Bruyere stopped and looked at her without speaking.

"I came to see Lynn and they put me out of the room. What do you mean by such behavior? I am not responsible for this."

"Hush! He is dying—this is no place for talk."

"But I will talk—did you suppose I was a creature of no spirit? You shall explain the meaning of all this—I will not be treated so, you have gone too far, I am in a dangerous mood."

Bruyere also, was in a dangerous mood, that of man, slow to anger, but burning now, with the sense of a great wrong. Stephens had been his friend, a fine sense of honor had kept him from declaring his love until Stephens, himself, had freed him from any obligations. That Julia Lendenning had been false to both—had gone to Stephens with words of love, while his kisses were yet warm on her lips—had driven Stephens to his death—that she had done these things Bruyere had dwelt upon till heart and brain alike was in a maze of pain and wrath—he was a madman.

He swung open the door of the little parlor, Miss Lendenning still clinging to his arm. As the door closed behind them, he faced her grimly:

"Now let's have it out."

There was that in his manner which revealed his pent up wrath. Miss Lendenning took her hand from his arm. If she had been wise, she would have let him go, but lust for power and dominion over the hearts of men, was strong in her—the one motive for existence. She began again her shallow complaints. Bruyere's anger increased with the recital;

"It's a lie!" he burst forth, "you are false as hell! You promised to marry me, and you sent him to his death, because he wouldn't play the game with you, and how many others, you have bedeviled by your beauty God only knows. You dare speak of love—you!—spawn of hell!"

Bruyere's half raised hand fell, he turned and would have left the room, but she caught his arm. Forcibly—in his madness, he knew not how forcibly—he threw her backward, her head struck the stove with a sickening thud, she fell to the floor and lay quite motionless.

In the room above, they were watching by the bedside of the dying man. Stephens was unconscious, but breathing feebly.

"Oh, why does the divine will permit such things?" cried Joanna.

"Ask me something easier," returned Hogden, drawing her away.

"How much have you slept in the last few days?"

"I don't know, does it matter?"

"If you weren't quite so imperial, a gentle shaking——"

"Shake me now—shake me quite hard—I can't make things seem right. I am hating—hating——" Joanna's voice trailed away into silence.

Hogden left her abruptly and returned to Stephens. How long was he, like Lentulus, to be condemned to thirst with the water at his lips?

"Will he go without knowing us?" whispered Joanna who had followed. Even as they were speaking Stephens opened his eyes. The look of pain and distress was gone, his eyes held an expression of dawning intelligence, he looked into the faces which bent above him, and his own face lighted with a look of understanding.

"It's—all—right," he articulated with difficulty, and the spirit had gone to meet its maker.

Hogden led Joanna gently from the room.

"It is over—he is beyond our help."

"If I could only feel I had always helped."

"We do the best we can, and leave to God the rest, you wound yourself needlessly with doubts, Miss Lester."

Hogden spoke gently, he longed desperately to take her in his arms, but convention forbade, and both had a feeling that the other was rather cold and they separated with dissatisfaction on the part of both.

Hogden sent Joanna home in his own car, re-entering the house, Mrs. McGaffey met him, with a frightened face:

"The lyddy is in there," pointing to the parlor door, "the lyddy that came to see the gentleman that's dead. She neither spakes nor moves, and there's blood on the floor. Och! that this should happen to a dacent house."

Hogden entered the parlor, Mrs. McGaffey at his heels. A little pool of blood under the motionless form, had advanced in a thin red line half way across the floor.

"Och! she's dead—indade she is!" lamented Mrs. McGaffey.

"Oh, no she isn't," cheerily returned Hogden, "it's only a badly cut face. She will live to do no end of mischief, yet. Call Stewart, the nurse, please, we have got a nice job here."

When Miss Lendenning came to her senses she was lying on a shabby couch in Mrs. McGaffey's still shabbier little parlor. Hogden was standing by the table putting some shining instruments back into their cases. She cried out in alarm and made a feeble attempt to rise.

"Don't be frightened," said Hogden reassuringly.

"Is he coming back?"

"No one is coming back, you are perfectly safe. When the car returns you will be taken home."

"He threw me against the stove—oh, the vile wretch! He——"

"I would not talk, movement of the facial muscles, increases the liability to an unsightly scar."

Miss Lendenning put her hand to her face. It was swathed in bandages, her head was aching frightfully, one side of her face and lip, felt as if pierced by a thousand needles, talking was difficult.

"Was my face cut?" she asked faintly.

"Yes—rather a nasty cut."

"Where?"

"From the eye, slantingly, across the cheek to the lip."

"Was my lip cut?"

"Completely severed," replied Hogden, with a certain grim pleasure in telling the truth.

Miss Lendenning gave evidence of a burst of passion.

"You can't cry—if you do, there is danger of making the scar more unsightly. Absolute quiet is the only safe course."

"Will there be a scar?"

"Yes, but not a bad one, if you are careful."

The first thing Miss Lendenning did on reaching her own door, was to make her way to a mirror, with all the haste her strength would permit. The sight staggered her. Could that terrible countenance be hers? And the first tears she had shed, rolled scalding down her cheeks. Was there ever fate like hers? She could not lament—could not even bring the wretch who had ruined her life, to his punishment, for the doctor had commanded

absolute quiet, when she could rend the heavens with a cry of despair and vengeance!

Her beautiful body had otherwise received no hurt. Man could still be made to feel her power, but she knew her kingdom had departed, that, the power she possessed, must be directed toward man's lower nature, yet, not for that would she hesitate. What else was there for her to do? If fate had cruelly deprived her of beauty, was she to blame? She would not yield her power without a struggle, death would be far preferable to life, without woman's great game, man the central figure.

CHAPTER XXVI

Between the Cup and the Lip

"Richard, you are blind—blind as a bat."

"Well, ar'n't they deserving of pity—those who can't see?"

"Or won't see. But that isn't you, Richard, I am unjust, you are too good, much too good for this naughty world."

"Thanks."

"Oh, you needn't thank me, I am merely stating facts, you are too good Richard Hogden, to see the evil in other people."

"What ought I to see, are you engaged in a plot to assassinate the mayor, and give us a mayoress?"

"I would give you incorruptible city government, if I could, but you would get it no sooner by placing it in the hands of women."

"Oh, the women! You men cannot fathom the depths of intrigue, the falseness, the cold selfishness, of woman's heart."

"Really! You appall me—we bachelors have our innings at last."

"You laugh! I could almost wish—oh, no, I don't, I hope fate will lead you to one of another sort."

"Won't you please mention one of another sort?"

"Richard! For all you are wise, you are stupid, else you would find her for yourself."

Hogden arose and, turning his back upon his tormentor, stood looking out of the window. Mrs. Hunter watched him anxiously.

"Marry her, Richard."

"But if she won't marry me?"

"I'll wager a diamond ring you have not asked her. But what is a woman's 'no' anyway—a little shyness, a little conceit, she expects you to ask the second time. Carry her off—shut her up,—primitive ways are sometimes best!"

"That is a great idea," said Hogden, taking a seat by her side. "Won't you enlarge upon that."

"If you say the word, I'll shut her up and keep her on bread and water until she consents."

"Thanks, no,—I want no poor starveling for a wife."

"Seriously, you don't know how I feel about Joanna's going to Paris with your mother."

"Tell me how you feel about it."

Mrs. Hunter nervously tapped the velvet rug, with the toe of her slipper. "Harriet Lovell accompanies your mother," she said.

"Yes, does that make any difference?"

"How like a man! Bring him face to face with the most obvious facts and he asks, does that make any difference?"

"Won't you further enlighten me—why should it make any difference?"

"Have you forgotten who Harriet Lovell is?"

"Why, no, she is Miss Harriet Lovell."

"Richard! What a comfort I could take in boxing your ears. Well, then, listen, I will refresh your memory. Harriet Lovell considers that she was once the promised wife of Richard Hogden."

"Nonsense! she must have forgotten that long ago, I am not sure she was ever aware of it."

"Blind—still blind. My dear young man, milady has twice asked me for your address that she might write you that you were released."

Hogden was very much annoyed; "Does Miss Lester know about that particular bit of foolishness?"

"She has never mentioned it, but it is quite likely she knows."

"Then if she knows, why give it further thought?"

"Do you know Harriet Lovell, Richard?—Know the real woman, I mean?"

"I can't say that I do, I have only met her a few times."

"But you know her well enough to know that you don't want to marry her?"

"Of course I do," replied Hogden wondering whither these questions were tending.

"Well, she knows it also, and more than that, she knows, or thinks she knows—which amounts to the same thing—the reason of the averse opinion of her."

"Hm, I am a man, and perhaps that accounts for my stupidity—just what is it that Miss Lovell knows, or thinks she knows?"

"That Joanna stands between her and the coveted prefix of Mrs."

Hogden had all a man's distaste in hearing that which was sacredly guarded in his own heart, was known to others. He looked his disgust;

"She must have the wisdom credited to the sphinx and, to be brutally frank, I never should have guessed it."

"That is because you are a man, my dear. Men never understand women, you either put us on a pedestal and worship us—which is never a safe thing to do, unless you find a Joanna, and I have lived to be an old woman and I have never found but two,—or you underrate our mental ability. We are born to intrigue."

"You find us easy game, eh?"

Mrs. Hunter's face saddened, "I wonder if kind Providence foresaw all the ills we would bring upon each other?"

"But you forget the blessings."

"True Richard, I did forget—It, is Joanna's business to keep me in mind of it. I do not want her to go abroad, Richard, I have a feeling—you will laugh—but I can't feel that it is quite safe for her to go with that cat!"

Hogden fulfilled her prediction;

"I should judge pussy's claws were in excellent condition," he said meditatively, and then arose and moved restlessly about the room.

"I have disliked this going abroad, too, and I have talked with my mother about it. I have tried to dissuade Miss Lester from going, but she seems so worn by her grief."

"Grief!—it's her ridiculous conscience. Joanna considers herself more or less responsible for every wrong that occurs upon this earth."

Hogden smiled and then grew grave again;

"Does she still persist in thinking herself to blame?"

"Of course she persists in it."

"In what way—how was she to blame?"

"Goodness knows! I don't try to understand when she talks to me—I can't."

Hogden remained silent so long that Mrs. Hunter spoke;

"What is it, Richard?"

"I was wondering if you were right in calling it conscience, might it not be love for him?"

"Yes, it might, but it isn't."

He looked up with boyish appeal.

"No, I shall not be eyes for you. Joanna is somewhere on the Avenue."

"I wonder——"

"You needn't wonder—I detest people who wonder—find the truth and put an end to your wondering."

With a laughing retort, Hogden vanished.

Mrs. Hunter sat where he had left her, she was thinking of the longing in his eyes. Her own suddenly filled.

"If Richard could be happy I think—heartless, wordly woman that I am—I could pray."

When Joanna entered, half an hour later, Mrs. Hunter was writing letters. She looked up at the former's entrance. "Exquisite," she said.

Joanna smiled faintly, rather absently, such compliments, she often heard, and to-day, she was too preoccupied to notice what had brought Mrs. Hunter's exclamation.

"Did you see Richard?"

"Yes, I saw him."

Mrs. Hunter dropped her pen and whirled in her revolving chair:

"Now, my dear, I want the whole story."

Joanna's eyebrows lifted in a fine assumption of surprise.

"Is there any more?"

"I was always glad the Lord gave me a son instead of a daughter."

"What now, is my particular sin?" Joanna was gently smiling.

"Your particular sin lies in not believing the best man that lives."

"The best man that lives is not showing any desire for that belief."

"Then stay at home, when he calls."

"Haven't I staid at home three whole days for that very purpose, in despair, I venture forth and find him riding with—another woman."

"Joanna!"

But the closing door cut short Mrs. Hunter's remark.

CHAPTER XVII

Paris

Paris, in the heat of a midsummer day, was broiling.

Joanna clad in white from parasol to her feet had sunk down in the shade of a gnarled old chestnut. Her music roll slipped and fell at her feet. The day had been a failure, her teacher had looked at her in despair;

"What ees et, Madmoiselle? Las' week you sing vera bad, and to-day what you say et ess—ah—*mauvais*. What ees et, Madmoiselle?" he continued more kindly.

"I think I shall not come any more—I cannot sing."

"Not sing! Ah but Madmoiselle has a voice—a voice heavenlee."

"But I cannot sing, I am homesick, I think."

"Home seek—ah, that ees?—"

"I want to go home."

Sitting there in the heat, in the drowsy Latin quarter, Joanna's thoughts were as busy as her hands were idle. Nearly four months had elapsed since she had watched New York disappear in the mists and rain. She knew she was not given to homesickness, what then, was this malady which had seized her, paralyzing every desire but a longing for home?

Like a physician in search of the hidden source of disease, Joanna mercilessly dragged forward for inspection the thoughts and feelings hidden away in her own soul. She had wanted to stay in New York—strange paradox, which no one would believe, since she had not stayed, but was it not proving, that she had chosen more wisely than she dreamed?

Hogden had shown his interest but Stephens had stood between—why had he been so persistent in giving her to Stephens? Was it pique that sent her across the Atlantic?

Joanna leaned back more comfortably on the stone bench, and let her eyes rest on the marble figure which supported upon its head and shoulders, the bowl, from which the water overflowed in musical rills into the larger bowl beneath. The pigeons cooed upon a nearby roof. It was very peaceful in this little spot, in the gay, heartless, hurrying city and she, one little atom of life in it, was homesick and heart sick, because somewhere across the Atlantic, another larger atom had not kept his promise—but no, he had not promised to write to her, he had asked her to write to him, and she had fulfilled her promise—had written twice, and Hogden had not answered.

"Oh the shame of it!" Joanna hid her face on the arm resting on the back of the stone bench. She went back in thought, to that day when she had set sail, not joyfully, but with steadiness of purpose, to pursue her studies here, in Paris. Hogden was waiting for them in the rain, and helped them from the car; Mrs. Hunter, grumbling over the weather and her Easter bonnet. "The wise lady of Gotham would go to sea, but if ever she does such a fool



“OH, THE THOUGHT OF IT!”

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thing again, I shall not wear my new bonnet." "Oh, dear," she had cried, "is this rain, my doing? If I could bring clear skies I would turn back."

"Will you hear that! After subjecting us to the strain of weeks of dread, dragging me here, to the ruination of my bonnet, she comes to the conclusion, that she will stay at home. Indeed you will not, my lady of Gotham, I am here to see you off, and off you go."

Hogden had looked down at her and smiled.

"May I venture to speak?" Joanna wondered, watching the pigeons, what it was he would have spoken. Miss Lovell had joined them at that moment and the conversation had become general.

"I hope you will write, Richard," said his mother in parting, "Harriet and I will be lonely."

And Hogden had looked at her (Joanna) a steady, compelling look, "I, too, shall watch for a letter," he had said. She had written and then for long weary weeks had looked for an answer and none came.

There was no mistaken address—Miss Lovell received letters which she was sure to announce as "one from Richard, aunt Pamela" perhaps she would read it, or part of it, aloud and Joanna could feel her heart becoming like a lump of ice in her breast.

Over and over, she recalled every look, every word, and her heart protested his truth, but it was all so puzzling and the gnawing ache increased.

She thought of Stephens, young, ambitious, with an enthusiasm for art which seemed to overpower all other feeling; many like him were gathered here, from far distant countries they came, to worship

at the shrine which they had chosen. The sight saddened rather than enthused her, Stephens had been like these gay, enthusiastic, volatile young artists, yet he never knew true art, it was but the outside shell—art without the soul. Her thoughts always turned from them to find strength in the solitary figure, who was fighting disease, maybe in haunts of vice.

Joanna was learning many things; she understood Stephens better, pitied him more, and loved him less.

She found the ladies at luncheon, on her return. Miss Lovell was holding an animated conversation with a French gentleman, whom, to herself, Joanna had given the title of the "Impecunious One."

Count Richarde was one, it is to be feared, of an increasing class of individuals, to be found on both sides of the Atlantic. His constant desire was for money, but just how it was obtained was of small importance. Nature had endowed him with a handsome face, save for a narrow, retreating forehead; hair and mustache were of bright blackness, the latter waxed to such needle points, Joanna could not prevent the ridiculous thought that they might prick his face.

Mrs. Hogden had lost her love for Paris, she talked vaguely of going to Italy. Society had forgotten her and her magnificent fetes—it had no gratitude. If it were not for the repairing of her wardrobe, she would return at once to New York—New York was really the only place where a Poindexter could live, and live as befitted a Poindexter.

"Sit down, Miss Lester, you are late to-day, Was it owing to the heat? It is insufferably warm—Oh, yes, we will excuse you," smiling indulgently

upon Miss Lovell, who with the count, withdrew to the small parlor adjoining.

"Harriet might do worse—much worse—but he has no money, and she is nearly penniless. No, it would not do at all, but he is very handsome, don't you admire him Miss Lester?"

"I don't care for Mephistophelian faces, I am afraid."

"Mephistophelian? Oh, how can you! He isn't that at all, is so chivalrous, too. But then, dear Harriet—it would not do; besides I have something better in store for her.

"I received a letter from my son to-day—oh, it does a mother's heart good to get a letter from her son, when he shows himself amenable to her wishes! His repentance is rather late in coming, but I hope dear Harriet will be happy at last. She is worthy of him in every way—she is half a Poin-dexter.

Richard writes that the will has been read. He professes to be greatly surprised, but I am not—naturally, my husband would leave everything to me—he never could overlook Richard's disobedience.

"I have been thinking," she went on languidly swaying her large white fan, that a chateau on the coast would be preferable to Paris in the summer. The American colony is so different this year, the old families are conspicuous by their absence."

Joanna listened in weary silence to the drivel of talk. She wondered ironically, how people could spend so much time talking, yet really saying nothing.

The evening was over at last, she had played her

part, had sung and, smiling, listened to the fulsome flattery with every appearance of appreciation—she was free now and face to face with herself and her Gethsemane.

In her own room, she flung open the long, low French window and seating herself leaned her head against the casement. All Paris was awake and trying to forget the heat of the day. The gay, beautiful city, the wicked, worldly city, with its prayers, its songs, its curses—it was awake.

Was God out there with those struggling myriads? Some bent on pleasure, some on sin, some few on doing good, or were they all victims of chance, their heart breaks as unheeded as the sere leaf on the bosom of the ocean?

Some words Hogden, once, had uttered, came flashing through her mind, "youthful ideals are supposed to desert a man before he reaches thirty-five * * * * * but exigency has forced one upon me—never to be found wanting."

Joanna slipped from her chair and rested her head on the window sill: "It is not true,—he could not do it"—she whispered.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A Plot Fails

The hot weather continued for a week. Mrs. Hogden agitated the question of the seashore, but Miss Lovell, for reasons of her own, did not second her aunt's suggestion, and Joanna, occupied with a desperate effort to keep her hold on faith, was regardless of physical discomfort.

One morning, while she lay sleepless on her pillow, trying to ignore the fact that her faith was not substantiated by reason, Florine, the Breton maid, was coquetting with the postman.

Depositing the letters on the tray in the hall, later to be placed on the breakfast table, she followed the postman out upon the walk to exchange one more little nothing, leaving the door ajar behind her. We are seldom disposed to credit the little, or even the great events, in our lives to Providence. Florine had no thought that she was being used as such an instrument, and certainly, Hortense, the big black cat belonging to the household, did not consider it. She was frolicing down the walk after the maid, in happy pursuit of a withered leaf when a yellow dog, her special aversion, caught sight of her and gave chase. The partly opened door seemed a haven of refuge, Hortense shot through the opening and up the winding stairway till her feline heart felt safety was reached. Here she sat with eyes

fixed on that narrow opening till her fur gradually assumed its glossy smoothness.

The striking of the clock hurried Florine to the kitchen; Hortense, who had recovered her dignified composure, was meditating a leap to the floor, when Miss Lovell in kimona and slippers came softly down the hall. Any one who had seen her only in evening toilet, would not have recognized her, so large a part does cosmetics, the hairdresser, and the dress maker, play in milady's makeup.

She went directly to the letters and examined them; Mrs. Hogden had one, Joanna, two, and herself none. Joanna's, she scrutinized carefully—looked at the postmark and held them to the light, one of them she recognized as Mrs. Hunter's. Miss Lovell fingered it, she wanted very much to see the inside, she even tried the seal. It might contain just what she wanted to know, and it might not.

The letter was laid down at last and she started to return to her room, then it occurred to her, that it might be best after all to see what the letter contained. It was just at this moment that Hortense decided to jump and she would have landed squarely on Miss Lovell's head, but for her feline agility. Poor Hortense, her nervous system was not proof against this second fright coming, so close on the heels of the first, she gave a frightened "meow" and disappeared behind the hall rack, from whence she peered forth with round yellow eyes.

Miss Lovell hated cats, she saw in Hortense's round eyes something quite satanic, besides, the long scratch on her arm smarted dreadfully. Leaving the coveted letter on the tray, she disappeared down

the hall to bathe her wounded arm and declare "the cat should be killed, it was really running mad, she had heard of such things."

A little later, finding rest impossible, Joanna decided to take her usual morning walk. Passing through the hall she gathered up her letters and liberated the mewling Hortense.

On either side of the wide paved walk, were small squares of green turf, from which grew a much pruned ornamental shrub. Joanna dropped into a rustic seat beneath the syringa and looked at her letters with a feeling of apathy. "Would he never write?"

Mrs. Hunter's was the one she opened first. It's first line was like an electric shock; "Joanna Lester, what is the matter, why don't you write? Why don't you answer my letters, are you ill? I am afraid there is trouble somewhere, and I am half distracted. Richard is at work in the fever stricken district, and I am worried nearly to death. I am going to tell you something, Joanna, he told me I must not, but I shall. The loss of that Miser's money has cost him his superintendency of the hospital. His removal had something to do with political graft but I don't understand politics.

Richard has not been himself since you went away, I cannot find out what it is. I cannot believe, Joanna, you would intentionally cause so much unhappiness, and I won't say 'I told you so' but I wish, Joanna Lester, you were at home.

P. S. Later, I hear Richard has the fever, come at once.

Elizabeth Hunter."

Joanna sat still, her limbs seemed stricken with palsy, objects wavered and receded, was she going to faint, now when all depended on instant action? She would not! and she sprang convulsively to her feet. There was not a moment to lose, and with a prayer on her lips she swiftly and methodically, made her preparations for the journey.

Mrs. Hogden was a late riser, the sun had made half his journey toward the zenith, before she dismissed her maid and entered the breakfast room. Miss Lovell was lounging by the window.

"Will you ring for breakfast, Harriet?" and Mrs. Hogden seated herself at the table but continued to use her fan. "If this hot weather continues, we must go to the seashore. Will you ring?"

Miss Lovell obeyed the thinly disguised command with exasperating coolness.

"Where is Joanna?"

"One never knows," replied Miss Lovell, making a wry mouth.

"What do you mean, Harriet?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all, aunt Pamela, why don't you read your letter?"

"It looks like something official, I do wish Joanna were here, such things are so fatiguing. I can't see any reason for her tardiness.

"Oh, dear, whatever shall I do now?" as the lawyer's letter and a copy of her late husband's will slipped from the envelope on to the table, "Joanna is so annoying to take this of all hours."

"Let me look," and Miss Lovell caught the papers with eager curiosity. She had noted that official looking envelope in the hall in the morning.

The lawyer's memorandum of investments, she

skipped, for she could make but little out of it, but these words on another sheet caught her eye. "I give and bequeath to my wife, Pamela Hogden, and her neice, Harriet Lovell, jointly my house on Fifth Avenue. Also I give and bequeath to my wife the sum of seventy thousand dollars. To my son, Richard Hogden I give and bequeath all lands and properties contained in the following list of investments, requesting that he set aside such a portion as he deems best for the building and maintenance of a charity hospital."

The bulk of her uncle's property was given to his son. Miss Lovell hardly knew whether she was glad or sorry. If things resulted as happily as the outlook indicated she was glad that Richard Hogden was his father's heir, but one could never be sure what was in his mind.

"What do you make of it?" asked her aunt complainingly.

"It is a copy of uncle Herbert's will, he leaves you—"

"Yes," impatiently, "Why don't you go on?"

"He leaves you seventy thousand dollars."

"You must have made a mistake—read it again."

Miss Lovell read aloud to her aunt all that she herself had read.

"Your son gets the greater part of the money."

"Impossible, his father never approved of his course, he would never give his fortune to the support of a charity hospital—there must be some mistake."

"It does seem a strange thing for uncle Herbert to do," remarked Miss Lovell, yawning behind her fan.

"It is wicked!—shameful! what else has he left me?"

"I give and bequeath my home on Fifth Avenue, jointly to my wife, Pamela Hogden and her niece, Harriet Lovell."

"How absurd! What does it mean?"

"It means that we are joint heirs—we both own it."

"The most ridiculous thing! To think after all these years of patient sacrifice on my part, I should be forced to endure this."

"Wouldn't it be well to consult some one Aunt Pamela?"

"Yes, but whom shall I consult?" snapped her aunt.

"You might ask the Rev—"

"A minister! I want a lawyer."

"Won't you hear me out? The Reverend Edward Weare seems to know all Americans in Paris, he might be able to direct you to a lawyer."

"Possibly, but I doubt it. Was there ever a woman placed in such a dilemma, robbed by her own son! I cannot understand it, and no one to explain. Ring for Joanna."

Miss Lovell indolently complied.

"We might try the American Legation, I must have light on this matter, it is a terrible tax on my strength. Will you tell Miss Lester, she is wanted, at once, in the breakfast room," she said to the maid who entered.

"She is not here, Mees."

"Not here? Where is she, then—what does this mean?"

"I don't know Mees, her trunk stand in the hall."

"Well, of all things! What conspiracy is this? See that her trunk is at once returned to her room," and forgetting her languor, she used her fan much as the chairman of an assembly might use his gavel, much to the detriment of its ivory sticks.

"Do you know anything about this, Harriet?"

"How should I know—I am not watching Miss Lester's movements," drawled the young lady addressed, secretly enjoying this exhibition of her aunt's vexation and disappointment.

"If I may suggest—"

The sentence was left unfinished for Joanna stood in the doorway.

"I am going home—to America," she said.

"Going home! Impossible! I need your assistance, I really cannot allow it. Have you taken leave of your senses, Miss Lester? I have here a communication from my lawyer, and it requires prompt attention."

Joanna ignored the lawyer's letter, her manner was stern. "I must go; a friend is sick and needs me."

"But I need you, I repeat, I cannot dispense with your services. Your friend will either get well or be beyond your help before you reach there—you can do no good."

"I can at least, try."

"Mere nonsense, and silly sentiment; who is the friend you fancy needs your presence?"

"Your son, Madame," and Joanna was half away down the stairs before Mrs. Hogden had recovered her breath.

"Harriet, ring for the maid—for my smelling salts. Oh, to think this should happen to me—oh,

the ingratitude! My son will have every care,—bring me my shawl, Harriet, I must lie down. We must go home of course, and I have so little strength. It is always the way, enjoyment is never mine for long, and my wardrobe only half completed! It certainly is very inconsiderate but of course we must go."

Miss Lovell thought differently, if Richard Hogden lived, her nicely laid plans were as if woven together with gossamer threads, if he died, the money would be given to her aunt by slow process of law, they were as sure of it in Paris as anywhere. Meanwhile, she had various little plans of her own, which she intended to push; they might reach a happy culmination, who knew? She certainly should not give them up, for anything so chimerical as a share of her uncle Herbert's fortune, besides, she did not wish to see Richard Hogden, just then.

Her aunt must be convinced that it was best to remain in Paris. This she accomplished by dint of flattery, and solicitude for Mrs. Hogden's health.

"It was really dangerous," she assured her aunt, "to attempt the passage, when the system was so enervated by the heat of the summer."

"It would be useless to make one's self sick, and it might result worse than that. Besides, what did they really know about the matter? Miss Lester, might have fabricated the story in her desire to get home. It was doubtless some foolish love intrigue, Miss Lester had an evident liking for the bourgeois."

CHAPTER XIX

Joanna Returns

The one thing of which Joanna was continually aware was the slow rate of speed. The trains seemed to crawl, the steamer to stand still in mid ocean. At first she constantly watched the western horizon, feeling that her great longing could detain the soul that might be starting on its flight. But helpless waiting became intolerable, and realizing, if reason was to retain its throne, some relief must be had from the terrible monotony of her thought, she sought the steerage and ministered to the sick and disabled.

They looked askance at her at first, not having found kindness so plentiful, that they could readily understand deeds like hers. But, when they knew that the beautiful lady, who never smiled and seldom spoke, was there to help those who needed help, and no money asked when cure was effected, they brought their sick to her, half believing, she had only to lay her hands on them.

Joanna sometimes wondered, long afterward, how she ever lived through the torture of those days. When the American shores were at last sighted, her impatience was almost beyond control. She had cabled to Mrs. Hunter, if she should fail to meet her, precious time might be wasted, every moment

might mean so much, and to fail now, when so near!

She was the first to cross the gangplank, and her eye caught the sight of Mrs. Hunter in the crowd.

"Thank God," said the latter as she grasped Joanna's hand, "I have been so fearful."

Joanna's lip quivered, but she would not break down, now.

"Rich—Dr. Hogden."

"He yet lives, I think."

"Don't!" gasped Joanna, clutching her arm, "don't—not now."

Seated in the limousine, she clenched her hands till the nails cut the flesh, "Now," she said, "what do they think?"

Mrs. Hunter was wiping away the tears;

"They thought, if you got there in time——"

Joanna uttered a short, sharp cry.

"Don't look like that, dear, the doctors have hopes, he has been asking for you—they told him you were coming. I have not seen him, yet, he is in the quarantined district and I have lived on the wharf, watching for you. It has been very hard for you, Joanna."

"Don't!" Joanna's voice ended in an inarticulate sound.

"We are almost there! Courage, I am hopeful, and if I can trust in Providence, Joanna, surely you must."

Joanna was out of the car before it had hardly stopped, she wondered confusedly, why people seemed to be expecting her, and why there was someone stationed at every turn. Afterward she learned how dear to the hearts of the people, was Hogden. He had fought for the lives of their loved ones

at the risk of his own, and now they stood and watched for her who was coming, that was all they could do.

Joanna was troubled by no words, there was just the pointing hand, and she sped on, thanking them in her heart that they stopped her not, with questioning.

Hogden lay oblivious of his surroundings, his hand feebly fumbling with the counterpane, hollow eyes, bright with fever, staring, but, evidently unseeing.

Joanna sank on her knees by his side and imprisoned the wandering hand in both her own. Slowly, the sick man's gaze met hers, the eye lighted with intelligence, looked at her doubtingly, at first, as if she might be a creature of his fancy, and not real. Joanna's eyes, suddenly overflowed. It seemed to satisfy him, that she was not a vision, and one of his rare smiles illumined his face, his lips moved, then the eyelids slowly fell, the restless limbs relaxed, and he lay like one dead.

Joanna hid her face on his hand, mercifully unconscious until aroused by the doctor's voice.

"Well, she arrived in time—I think he will live, but it was a narrow escape."

In response to a query of the nurse concerning Joanna, the doctor grunted.

"Fainted? No, she'll come to all right, she doesn't look the sort that faints."

The doctor was old and gruff and cherished the opinion that most earthly ills began with women, but it might have been owing to the fact that he was a bachelor.

Joanna raised her head, and met the eyes looking

down at her behind the large gold rimmed spectacles.

"Will he live?"

"Yes, he will live," gruffly, "and will probably wonder why he did."

Joanna smiled but there were tears in her eyes and she bowed her head once more, on the unconscious sick man's hand. She fancied its feeble pulsation had grown stronger—had life indeed come back to him, with her coming?

"I wish to help in his care," she said, "I am a nurse."

"And the physician in charge, too, eh?"

"No, don't quarrel with me please, for you see I must take care of him."

"I can't say I do see it, but if you do, I suppose it's all right, if he had his senses, no doubt he would like such an arrangement," and the little old doctor continued to stare at her, through his spectacles, as if he wondered at the infatuation of men.

The fever left Hogden weak, so weak, his life hung by a thread, as it were. But Joanna's hope in his recovery was indomitable. The doctor eyed her, at times, as if she possessed some uncanny power to hold the sick man back from the brink, at which his feet lingered.

"You say he can't die," said the man of science, "Well, I hope he won't die, but if he can't, then he's the first man of that kind, that I have seen yet."

Joanna only smiled. How could science understand the feeling which told her that Hogden was fighting hard for her sake—the heart's feeble pulsation increased under her touch, love must be strong enough to hold him—how could she let him go!

Slowly, but surely, the returning tide of life

carried him back toward safety, even beyond the danger limit. Rested and refreshed from her last night's vigil, Joanna stole into the room. The morning sun was beginning to gild the topmost spires. The storm had freshened and invigorated the air, the fever was checked at last, and its toll of victims ended. And Hogden lay unconscious that his fight was won.

Joanna drew a chair to the bed side, and softly laid her hand on the thin one stretched on the covering. Hogden opened his eyes, at first he smiled like a child awaking from pleasant slumber. Then the man awoke, and under that steady gaze, Joanna trembled and drooped.

"Why—are—you here?" demanded Hogden, evidently thinking that which was evident needed some explanation.

"I came because you were sick," said Joanna slipping out of her chair and hiding her burning face.

"Why did you return my letters unanswered?" continued the inexorable voice.

"I return your letters!" Joanna raised her head fearful this was a new phase of the fever and he was raving. "I returned no letters—you did not write and—I wrote you twice," and Joanna's face was again hidden after this confession of guilt.

Hogden did not speak for several moments. Joanna felt his hand gently touching her hair.

"There has been some terrible mistake somewhere—but let that go. Joanna?"

She raised her head.

"Why have you come?"

"Because"—Joanna's head drooped again.

Hogden's breath was coming hard, he seized her hand in a fierce grip.

"I must leave the room," pleaded Joanna, "if you will get so excited."

"Excitement be hanged!" panted Hogden. "Do you love me, Joanna?"

"A man so willfully foolish he will ask such a superfluous question, doesn't deserve an answer," was the muffled retort.

Hogden chuckled.

"Joanna?"

Again she raised her head. His eyes rested on her face, her lips, each wave of hair; so might a dying warrior have looked on that for which he had given his life.

Joanna's eyes filled;

"Don't Richard, I—I cannot bear it! How you have suffered and I was hardening my heart—I didn't know."

Hogden drew her head down on his breast.

"Now I'll go to sleep."

"Richard!—you frighten me—you don't mean—

"Silly girl, I mean, I can rest now. Dear heart, you don't know how I have longed for this hour—hungered for it—lie closer—closer."

Hogden was silent and Joanna resting motionless, tried to check the tears, which were annointing him in his sleep.

CHAPTER XXX

A Wedding

With Joanna to administer to his wants, Hogden thought he would like to continue his convalescence forever; but returning strength made him impatient to be on his feet again.

"To-morrow, we will go to uncle David's," he announced one morning when she brought in his breakfast.

"And he has been sitting up for only a few hours each day—what new delirium is this?"

"It's no delirium—I am merely giving proof of what can be done by an excellent nurse."

"It's most arrant flattery—trust him not," said Joanna in a stage aside. "Your weapon is one that Adam used, I do not fear it."

"What a tyrant a woman is, when she gets the chance," grumbled Hogden.

"But isn't it our right?" laughed Joanna. "Who could blame us poor things! If, for a moment, we catch at the scepter which you wield—you of the stronger sex, with your greater power."

"Humph! No power at all—we are mere puppets in the hands of designing women."

Joanna knelt by his reclining chair.

"Let's compromise. Wait three days, and you shall visit uncle David, or any other uncle."

"He is the only one I want to see, and with him, I have especial business."

"Well, I am sure he would willingly wait three days."

"I am not sure I shall,—to-morrow is quite long enough. A score of things might happen before to-morrow. The Brooklyn bridge might burn, you might tire of your task, and seek another patient."

"I am quite positive none of your dreadful imaginings will happen, but we will say day after to-morrow, if the weather is pleasant."

But it was not. Hogden was forced to wait four days instead of two. He professed to believe the postponement a bad omen and foreboded so many disasters, Joanna's curiosity was aroused.

"Where is this mysterious uncle to be found?"

"There is nothing mysterious about uncle David."

"Am I supposed to be content with that bit of information?"

"Why, that is as it pleases you. There might be food for reflection, not inappropriate at this time, in that little fable about the man with a blue beard."

Joanna absently, pulled a handful of daisies from a vase at her side.

"The American man is such a dear, nothing can really be compared to him, he is a prince among men,"—and she gently sighed, "if only we could have a whole one,—but we can't."

Hogden laughed. "Isn't that a serious charge? explain yourself."

Gratified in having aroused his curiosity, she began to pull the petals from a daisy, one by one, saying as she did so. "He loves business—loves his profession—loves success—loves mystery—loves me, if out of office hours——"

Hogden's hand fell heavily on her own imprisoning it.

"Look at me," he continued.

Joanna demurely raised her eyes.

"Don't you know," gravely, with a note of passion in his voice, "that life—the real life—began with you, and without you, it would not be worth the living? I watched for you, I dreamed of the day, when I should find my ideal in a living woman; and then in the midst of the terror and the storm——"

"Oh," breathed Joanna, "it was you!" and she hid her face on his arm, Hogden's fingers found their way to the bowed head.

"Is it, then, so distasteful?"

"Distasteful! Oh, how could you think that! I am glad—so glad that I owe my life to you and to no other, you saved it—dear, it's yours."

"I am glad, too, that you owe it to no other—that it is all mine," said Hogden, gently caressing her hair, for her face was again hidden.

"Have I done, with it, what you would have me do?" she whispered.

The hand on her hair trembled a little;

"It was not only your own life, but mine that you were directing. I was fast becoming a cynic. For the sake of an ideal, I had been turned out of my father's house, but to find, I thought, that she—my dream lady—did not exist in the flesh. And, with the hope of finding her, went a certain joy in living.

"I began to take more pleasure in the mere fact that I could hold back the hand of death, than I did in the life of the one I had saved.

"Then came the storm, I had remained on deck to watch its progress, and was not wholly unpre-

pared for the shock, still I was expecting the steamer would pass us with only a rub or two. When something fell against me and slid over the railing, I caught it instinctively. It surprised me a little when it proved to be a woman. She lifted her white face to mine and coolly told me to drop her into the seething waters and save my own life, and it struck me, that she expected I would do it. My pride suffered horribly, and it was with the keenest satisfaction that I drew her over the railing and set her feet once more on deck.

"I watched her as she flitted about among the demoralized crowd. The feeling was strong that I had found the 'dream lady' and I wanted further speech with her, but she eluded me. Just as I was giving up hope, she touched my arm. I don't know what I did expect. She had already thanked me all fair enough, I suppose, but I wanted something more; and she, evidently had the same feeling, for she spoke of her burden of gratitude. But she saw no way out of the dilemma, in which I had placed her, only, that she use that which I had saved, for the good of humanity.

"I knew then, without a doubt, that it was the 'dream lady,' she was so remote. What did I care for the welfare of all the other Toms and Dicks. I had saved her life and I coveted the reward. Then she moved away and was lost in the crowd before I—dolt that I was—could ask her a single question."

Hogden's pause was so long, the face hidden on his arm, was timidly lifted, but to return to its hiding place at his next words.

"The next time, she did not escape me, but she has kept me in pursuit a long time. Joanna?"

She looked up.

"I want what I saved?"

"It is yours, dear,—didn't you know?"

And you will go to uncle David's with me, to-morrow?"

In her anxiety for him, the significance of his words escaped her.

"I'll go to the ends of the earth, only—you look so pale, dear, how could I have let you talk so long? I'll go now."

"No, my dream lady," seizing the skirt of her dress. "You are here, and here I intend to keep you. Trust a little more to my judgment, please, I'll be careful. If you will sit there by the window and sing to me, I'll go to sleep."

Doubtfully, Joanna complied with the request. The look on Hogden's pale face, at the sound of the first notes, made her falter. Kneeling by his side, she looked up with her wishful smile.

"Is there anything troubling you, dear, anything you can't tell me?"

Hogden's smile—it was more of a mischievous grin—was reassuring.

"No, you shall know it all to-morrow."

And with that she had to be contented.

"Do you think you are feeling fit for this undertaking?" asked the doctor the next morning, as Hogden, rather unsteadily, got into his coat.

"Of course I'm fit, don't mind him," he said, catching sight of Joanna's face, "he always was a croaker, an arrant coward as well, I have known him to hide rather than meet a lady."

"I'll tell my story another time."

"All right, I don't want to stop for it now."

But Hogden had so much difficulty in getting started, Joanna begged him not to go.

"Don't," he replied in a tense voice, "don't, if you love me, for I have set my heart on going. It is only the start that is difficult."

And so it proved. His spirits rose with each mile passed.

"Oh," cried Joanna, as they caught a breath from the clover fields, "this is delightful! Is it very far to this uncle David's?"

"Not very far," and Hogden slackened speed.

"I have something to tell you," he drew a small bundle of letters from his pocket and handed them to the wondering Joanna.

"I found them in my father's possession."

"Oh, Richard, did you care? He seemed to want them."

"No, no," he hastened to reply, soothingly, "I wanted to tell you what they—what you did for me."

"Don't look so frightened," smiling into her anxious eyes. "It is all right—more right than I feared it ever would be. My rupture with my father was always a source of grief to me. I had begun to think it never would be set right. Then you—his doctor Jo—through the power God gives to some women, found a way to his heart and drew me in with you. You made death easier for him and life easier for me. I wonder if there is any good thing that has come to me, that has not come through you?"

"Oh," sobbed Joanna on his shoulder, "I have brought you plenty that was not good. Through me, they turned you out of the hospital; you didn't under-

stand what I wanted to make you understand, and I was proud. I went away and you caught the fever and I thought—oh, I thought I was to be punished for my wickedness.”

“You have no reason to blame yourself,” said Hogden, gently, “I would have left the hospital if there had been no miser and no money. And what trick of the imagination made you think, dear, you were responsible for the fever?”

“It was not a trick of the imagination.” Joanna lifted her head with a tremulous smile. “It is that you won’t see.”

“Well, we will leave it that way, I don’t punish you as you deserve, what shall we say—a beating?—because I can’t see that you deserve it.”

“Think of the risk incurred by such leniency.”

“I will take all risk, now for the rest of my story; my father has left the greater part of his large fortune to me to build and support a charity hospital.”

“Oh, Richard!” Joanna’s tearful delight was hidden on his shoulder.

“It has been my desire for years, we are to perfect the plans to-day. I hope you will approve of what I have chosen.”

“I shall, but don’t tell me any more, please, until I let the joy of this sink in—I thought I had ruined your career. In that you were forced to do the little things, when you should be doing the great.”

“Foolish girl!” Did you think I would mind a little jolt like the loss of a superintendency? My fame has already doubled.”

A sudden turn brought the little village into view.

"Oh, stop!" pleaded Joanna, "and let me enjoy the beauty of all this."

"It is a fine view, you see the beginnings of the hospital on the hill yonder—the grove at the back."

"Such a romantic, sleepy little spot, and the thunderings of the metropolis only a few miles away. It should be called the 'Home of Content,' how did you find it, dear?"

"You forget this is uncle David's home and with him we have special business."

"True, I had forgotten, but why do you say 'we?' "

"Because I mean 'We.' "

"Am I to be told the particular purpose of this visit?"

"He is going to marry me to the 'dream lady,' Won't you look up dear? I teased you at first, but I thought you would understand. When you didn't I should have explained, but an awful fear had taken possession of me—a fear that for some reason, I should be made to wait, so I plotted; you would not have the heart to disappoint me now, would you?"

"Joanna."

Under the compelling force of his voice, Joanna raised her head and met his gaze for one long breathless moment. Then before she could reach the comforting shelter of his shoulder, Hogden's lips met and held hers.

To them it was as if a door had suddenly opened on a transformed world where, with their happiness, they dwelt apart.

David Hogden met them at the gate. This was to be the crowning joy of his life. His nephew,

Richard Hogden, had been the only strong human tie he had had for many years. And now, after he had met with prayerful patience an idle, rather joyless old age, this same nephew came with the plans of a hospital, a church, and last and best of all "The one woman in all the world" with whom he wanted to share his life.

In his gratitude, David Hogden wondered at the dispensation of Providence—what had he done that he should receive so much?

He took Joanna into his arms and kissed her tenderly;

"This is one of the great joys of my life. I know no one to whom I would more willingly give my boy."

"But you don't know me—I may be other than I seem."

"Don't I know you? You mistake, I have known you for a long time. Your picture had its place in my study until Richard carried it away."

"Have a care, uncle David, don't reveal any secrets, until the knot is tied—you will find it safer."

And he would have had the wedding then and there, but Joanna refused and was seconded by his uncle. Much against his will Hogden, as he phrased it, "was put to bed," which on his wedding day, was an unforgettable injury.

To Joanna, who watched by his side, it was an hour of sweet consecration and tears and kisses alike, fell on the hand she held while it's owner slept.

They were married in the self same room, in which David Hogden had received his bride, years before. And it may have been thought of her, which prompted the close of the simple but impressive service;

"And now, in accordance with the divine plan, I give each to the other for all eternity."

Joanna felt her husband's hand close on hers in a fierce, responsive grip.

"I wonder," said Hogden, as they stood alone, "if I can make your life as happy as it might have been."

"Richard!" Joanna's exclamation was one of pain, "if you will condescend to think such thoughts, remember also that the past has been only a preparation for the present, I cannot even wish the sorrow had been left out, for it was through the sorrow that I found you."

"Thanks, dear," said Hogden a little huskily, "I won't condescend again. I suppose I did want to be first."

"You always have been in the heart of Joanna you know—the other one has disappeared."

Her own words came to her as she stood on the hill, later to be crowned by the hospital, she was a new Joanna, and how sweet, how gloriously beautiful was life.

"Come, dear," said Hogden, "spare me a few moments, I am already distractingly jealous, but it is a beautiful view, I never knew before, how beautiful, you see your responsibility."

"I shall shirk it, let us discuss your plans."

A unique way to pass one's wedding day she thought, but she would not have it otherwise, neither was there anything lacking that could add, a drop to her cup of happiness, which was already overflowing.

"Joanna!"

"Coming."

Hogden was resting at the close of that afternoon.

In his enthusiasm he had gone almost too far and was paying for it by an enforced rest of some hours.

"What is it?" asked Joanna as she resumed her seat by his side.

"It has just occurred to me that this isn't just the sort of a wedding day, you could have wished."

"In what way, dear, I don't quite understand?"

"Women enjoy the dress, the music, the company—everything that goes to make up a wedding, as society understands it."

"You forget that I am in and out but not really of society—I like the day better as it is."

"My Joanna, you—you are a brick! Mrs. Hunter has always counseled me to carry you off and at last I have done it."

"And shall I confess that I long have waited that happy denouement?"

This daring answer, Hogden greeted by a smothering embrace.

David Hogden, the sinking sun shining on his white hair, watched the two radiant faces as they disappeared from view.

"God is in His heaven," he said and, turning, he entered the house. He went directly to his desk, where stood his wife's picture, and looked at it long and lovingly.

"I did not suppose, Milly, I could be so happy, again, and in this world," he said.

CHAPTER XXXI

Conclusion

Joanna stepped out upon the vine covered porch and looked up the street which led to the hospital, no one was in sight.

The once sleepy town, was sleepy no longer, but wore an air of quiet energy, an energy which was at once apparent, yet, too dignified for bustle.

The hospital buildings stood completed, red and white against the dark back ground of trees. Sun baths, shady walks, flowers and fountains, a veritable paradise for healing. And the hospital was full. Sometimes Joanna wondered from whence they came, so many of them.

The little church had to be rebuilt to accommodate the people. David Hogden rejoiced, but he said it was to hear Joanna's voice and not his that they came. Still he was glad they came, there was something inspiring in that crowd of uplifted faces. " 'Tis the eloquence of his youth," said some. If David Hogden overheard, he only smiled. He knew this opportunity had been given him in answer to a prayer. Eloquence of his youth. No, he had never preached like this before—he was pouring out his soul, that his hearers might have a share of his own abundant happiness.

The latest acquisition to his congregation was

Mrs. Hunter, she had come, she said to listen to David Hogden and reflect in quiet, therefore she had made a permanent residence of her little villa, which overlooked the glinting waters of the sound.

But David Hogden was not deceived, the youngest representative of the family, Herbert Hogden junior, age two years and three months, held all their hearts in his grasp, and Mrs. Hunter's he occupied to the extinction of many things. For his sake, she had left the fashionable world to pine over the loss of her dinners, and buried herself in this most unfashionable little spot. "It is sure to be fashionable in time," she said to David Hogden. "I am not sure then," was the grave reply, "but it would be the Lord's will that I cast you out of it, thereby postponing the evil day."

"Oh, David Hogden, fortify your people against evil, then, when it comes there is no defeat."

This little encounter ended in an armed truce, but it was difficult to say which of the two, most enjoyed their little controversies.

Mrs. Herbert Hogden had visited the place, and only once. She wished to see the place, where the money which was rightfully hers, had been spent. On this occasion she had asked that the infant grandson be given to her. She would rear him tenderly and in every way befitting a Poindexter. On receiving a decided refusal, she told David Hogden that it was quite probable that his was her last visit—there were some things a Hogden could not do and one, was to rise to the level of a Poindexter.

Her husband's will had been a manifestation of this from beginning to end. Who, but a Hogden,

would have conceived of the idea of sharing one's home jointly, with some one else?

David Hogden made no reply to this but gravely assisted her into her limousine, from which she extended a beckoning hand, "is there any way to get rid of her?"

David Hogden recoiled, his was the open mind of a child, plots and counter plots unknown to it.

"I hardly understand you, Pamela, is it to a servant you refer?"

Mrs. Hogden slammed the door, without waiting for the chauffeur to close it.

"David Hogden was always a fool! He knew less now, that he had grown old. Why, oh, why, had a Poindexter ever stooped to marry a Hogden?"

The answer was not forthcoming—there was no one in the car to answer and Mrs. Hogden never tried to answer her own questions.

How to get rid of Harriet Lovell, became her one absorbing idea, and Miss Lovell, on her part, meant to abide by the provisions of her uncle Herbert's will and here we leave them.

Failing to discern the familiar figure with its swift advancing stride Joanna went in search of the voices she heard in the orchard. Little Herbert and his great uncle, whom he chose to consider as a grandfather, were engaged in scaling a hay cock, each attempt ended in the youngster's rolling ignominiously to the bottom.

Joanna sat down on the rustic bench and watched the climber of the miniature Parnassus. At last he reached the summit, and essayed a call to his mother, "see, muvver, see," but the effort cost him his balance and again he slid helplessly to the foot.

Abandoning such arduous play, he lay contentedly, watching pussy in her pursuit of grasshoppers.

Relieved of his post as assistant climber, David Hogden seated himself on the bench by Joanna's side, he looked pale and weary.

"What is it uncle David?" she asked as he did not speak.

"Only another of my failures—the list is already long."

"For shame, to treat yourself so ill! Now, you must tell me all about it."

"It is one of the newly arrived patients. I have seen her twice—I saw her this afternoon—the visit saddened me."

"Richard thinks you are giving yourself too little rest."

"Rest not, haste not," Goethe says, and I cannot haste, therefore I must not rest, for the moments fly and I am old. But to go back to my patient. I cannot rid myself of the thought that I have once known her, but her face is so horribly scarred I cannot tell."

"Do you know her name?"

"Lendenning, I think, but my memory is a broken reed—the name means nothing. The state of the poor creature's mind is most pitiable, whatever misfortunes have befallen her, she exonerates herself from all blame. I cannot reach her—she pointedly told me she regarded my visits an intolerable nuisance."

"Poor uncle David, I think that ought to arouse even your saintship."

"It has, but not in the way you mean. If I had the eloquence and missionary spirit of a Paul, but I

am an old man and can do but little. Yet, the Father knows he has more worthy instruments for the great tasks, if I can but faithfully perform what is allotted to me, I will be content.

"We are marching shoulder to shoulder, as it were, along life's way, toward the goal, life eternal. Note the difference, some are like the cooling springs of the desert, within the circle of their influence, life leaps spontaneously into beauty and fruition—such are the Richards and Joannas."

"And uncle Davids."

But he continued, seemingly unconscious of her words;

"We prate much about equality, yet many a child is born with the blood of a long line of sinful ancestors, in his veins. He is handicapped at the start, and who has been to blame? it is certainly not in accordance with the divine will. The status of the future generations rests largely in the hands of the women. The influence of a good mother may be felt through several generations and, unfortunately, with a bad mother it is the same.

Will they see it? will they realize that no one journeys this way, without leaving behind an impress for good or evil—a progeny of purity or a progeny of vice? The mother of this poor creature at the hospital was a good woman—as we ordinarily use that term—but she had a weakness for admiration and fine clothes. This weakness, in the daughter is increased fourfold—note the result.

What are these rights of which we hear so much—the clamorous voices of the women? If they get these rights they covet, will the next generation find its feet set Godward? If so, God speed the day

when women get their so called rights. We reek with materialism, yet here and there from this onward moving throng comes the cry for purity—love—God!

"Life holds out to woman more of pleasure, more of happiness, more of honor, than ever before; it also asks of her more responsibility, more patience, more watchful care, puts more temptations in her path and makes them more insidious. But on her, far more than she realizes, rests the saving of the race—what is she going to do?"

"Her own sweet will, David Hogden." Mrs. Hunter had stolen upon them, unawares. David Hogden smiled.

"Yes, that is what I expected, but, thank heaven, we have, always the Joannas—we cannot fail. But they are few—so few."

"Listen," Mrs. Hunter's eyes were bright with suppressed excitement, "I, too, have seen your patient and some day, David Hogden, I will give you material for a sermon and you shall not spoil it with too much chivalry. I almost think I could preach, myself, but I'll not. Why waste one's breath and peace of mind for so erratic a creature as a woman! Come to your old auntie, you cherub."

This last was an appeal to the young scion on the grass, who arose and hastened toward her as fast as his short, unsteady legs would let him. He was caught up in a raptuous embrace.

"A boy is worth a dozen girls, only there is sure to come a day, when he forsakes his reason for some tousel headed Miss."

"Yes, it is sure to come," returned David Hogden, still smiling.

"But 'fies, but 'fies," pleaded little Herbert clinging to Mrs. Hunter's skirts and pointing toward the garden.

"Yes, we will go in search of butterflies, it is a favorite pastime of older heads than yours."

"Tom dwampa, but 'fies," and the two moved away with the small toddler between them.

Joanna sat so still, in the stillness around her, she became aware it was not stillness, after all. She heard the ripple of the river, the droning of many insects, the far away note of the whip-poor-will, nature was not still, only peaceful. Peace seemed to wrap her around like a blanket.

Her thought went back to David Hogden's words. Life was so full, so sweet, if it were not for the hospital, she would forget the world held ought but peace and joy.

"Joanna."

"Richard! you startled me, I watched for you and thought you had been detained."

"What is it?" he asked in quickly aroused sympathy, noting the tear which trembled on her lashes.

"Nothing," extending her hands with a radiant smile. "Take me—I would be comforted," and leaning on her husband's shoulder, she sang softly;

"And far across the hills they went
In that new world which is the old!
Across the hills, and far away
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
Beyond the night, across the day,
Thro' all the world she followed him."



VIA VITAE

A NOVEL

By S. SLATER, JR.



BOSTON, MASS.
THE ROXBURGH PUBLISHING COMPANY
(INCORPORATED)



"OH, THE SHAME OF IT!"

Publisher's Note

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